

# PROBLEMS OF MARXISM

## INTRODUCTION

In this section we have included some basic texts from the Prison Notebooks dealing with problems of Marxism itself. The first part, *Some Problems in the Study of the Philosophy of Praxis*, has the same fragmentary character as the *Problems of Philosophy and History* (pp. 343-77), and like that text is the result of some re-ordering of Gramsci's MS by the original Italian editors. Two basic themes underlie the notes. One is the need for a reconstruction of the origins of Marxism, beginning with the works of Marx and Engels themselves. The second concerns the liberation of the Marxist tradition from various accretions of a positivist and/or neo-Kantian order, characteristic of much of orthodox Marxism since the death of Engels. In the notes Gramsci stresses Marx's debt to English political economy and to the idealist tradition in German philosophy, culminating in Hegel, seeing Marxism as a synthesis of these two trends with the political heritage of the French Revolution. The originality of Marxism, in this perspective, lies in its definitive rejection of any form of transcendentalism, rather than in its materialism. This leads Gramsci to a reformulation of the critique of idealism. Although he argues the need to combat directly the theories of Croce and devotes large sections of his Notebooks (MS. pp. 171-254, not reproduced in this volume) to precisely this task, he locates the main enemy of the philosophy of praxis not in idealism as such but in transcendence and metaphysics, focusing his attention on the neo-Kantian deviations of the Austro-Marxism of Adler and Hilferding and on the "materialist" orthodoxy of Plekhanov and Bukharin.

The second part of the section consists of Gramsci's *Critical Notes on an Attempt at Popular Sociology*, which provide a sustained critique of the "vulgar materialist" aspect of Marxist orthodoxy. Nikolai Bukharin's *The Theory of Historical Materialism, A Manual of Popular Sociology* was first published in Moscow in 1921, where it went through several editions. An English translation, based on the third Russian edition, was published by Allen and Unwin in 1926, under the title *Historical Materialism, A System of Sociology*, and there was a French edition in the following year, which was probably

the one known to Gramsci. (For reasons which will appear, we have preferred, in our translation of Gramsci's text, to stick to the original title as used by Gramsci.) Various criticisms were made of the book, on grounds of positivism and vulgar materialism, initially by Lukács (see *New Left Review*, No. 39) but also by Soviet philosophers. Lenin had observed, in his "Testament", that Bukharin was a brilliant theoretician but "ignorant of the dialectic", a criticism which was to gain force with the revival of interest in the dialectic following the publication in the Soviet Union of Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*. In the face of criticism Bukharin made attempts to modify his point of view. Gramsci refers in this connection to a paper given by Bukharin at the London Congress of the History of Science in June-July 1931, which unfortunately we have been unable to trace. There is no doubt, though, that the text he wrote for the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in 1933 (published in *Marxism and Modern Thought*, by N. Bukharin and others, edited by Ralph Fox, London 1935) represents a last-ditch attempt to reconcile the positions of the 1921 *Manual* with the criticisms levelled against it—and not only from the "idealist" standpoint of Debordin and Lukács. By that time however Bukharin's days were numbered, politically as well as philosophically. He had been under fire for his opposition to the first Five Year Plan and the collectivisation of agriculture and was put on trial for his part in a supposed "conspiracy" and executed in 1938.

The interest and importance of Gramsci's critique are two-fold. In the first place Bukharin, despite his subsequent disgrace, represented an influential current within orthodox Marxism. He was in many ways the inheritor of a materialist tradition which flourished as much in Social-Democratic circles as within the Communist movement and whose influence has survived to this day. Gramsci's exposure, from an alternative Marxist standpoint, of the crudity and banality of a style of thinking of which the *Manual* is a prime representative has therefore more than academic and historical interest. More important still is the fact that, in the course of his demolition of the vulgar materialist position of the *Manual*, Gramsci in the *Critical Notes* comes closer than anywhere else to a systematic *exposé* of the principles underlying his own approach to the problems of Marxist theory. Gramsci's Marxism was essentially critical. For that reason he could not be content with any doctrine which attempted to reduce Marxism to the status of a positive science—in Bukharin's case a "sociology"—separating the thing known from the process whereby knowledge is acquired. And, by reason of this

same critical method, it is through his analysis of the errors of the *Manual*—sociologism, vulgar materialism, philistinism, ignorance of the dialectic—that he himself most clearly expresses the dialectical historicism which is the hallmark of his own genius.

*SOME PROBLEMS IN THE STUDY OF THE PHILOSOPHY  
OF PRAXIS*

*Statement of the problem*

Production of new *Weltanschauungen* [world outlooks] to fertilise and nourish the culture of an historical epoch, and philosophically directed production according to the original *Weltanschauungen*. Marx is the creator of a *Weltanschauung*. But what is Ilich [Lenin]'s position? Is it purely subordinate and subaltern? The explanation is to be found in Marxism itself as both science and action.

The passage from utopia to science and from science to action. The foundation of a directive class [*classe dirigente*] (i.e. of a State) is equivalent to the creation of a *Weltanschauung*. How is the statement that the German proletariat is the heir of classical German philosophy to be understood? Surely what Marx<sup>1</sup> wanted to indicate was the historical function of his philosophy when it became the theory of a class which was in turn to become a State? With Ilich this really came about in a particular territory. I have referred elsewhere<sup>2</sup> to the philosophical importance of the concept and the fact of hegemony, for which Ilich is responsible. Hegemony realised means the real critique of a philosophy, its real dialectic. Compare here what Graziadei\* writes in the introduction to *Prezzo e sopra-prezzo*:<sup>4</sup> he puts forward Marx as a unit in a series of great men of

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<sup>1</sup> The statement that the German proletariat is the heir of classical German philosophy is not in Marx but is the final sentence of Engels' *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 333, 357 and 365 above. The "fact of hegemony" referred to is of course the Soviet Revolution. The attribution of the "concept of hegemony" to Lenin is more difficult to interpret, since the word hegemony as such does not figure prominently in Lenin's work. It seems most likely that what Gramsci has in mind are aspects of Lenin's general theory of proletarian revolution as they evolved in the struggle against economism and as they are expressed for example in *Two Tactics of Social Democracy* (1905).

\* Graziadei is backward in comparison with Monsignor Olgiati,<sup>3</sup> who, in his volume on Marx, finds no comparison possible except with Jesus—a comparison which, coming from a prelate, is really the most extreme concession, given that he believes in the divine nature of Christ.

<sup>3</sup> F. Olgiati, *Carlo Marx*, Milan, 1918.

<sup>4</sup> *Prezzo e sopra-prezzo nell'economia capitalistica* [Price and surplus price in capitalist economy], subtitled "A Critique of Marx's theory of value" and first published by Edizioni Avanti, Milan, 1923. Count Antonio Graziadei (1873–1953) joined the PCI at Livorno, wrote the theses on the agrarian question for the 1922 Rome Congress, and became one of the main leaders of the Right after the congress. At the Fourth World Congress, he was the principal spokesman for the



science. Fundamental error: none of the others has produced an original and integral conception of the world. Marx initiates intellectually an historical epoch which will last in all probability for centuries, that is, until the disappearance of political society and the coming of a regulated society.<sup>5</sup> Only then will his conception of the world be superseded, when the conception of necessity is superseded by the conception of freedom.

To make a comparison between Marx and Ilich in order to create a hierarchy is stupid and useless. They express two phases: science and action, which are homogeneous and heterogeneous at the same time.

Thus, historically, a parallel between Christ and St. Paul would be absurd. Christ—*Weltanschauung*, and St. Paul—organiser, action, expansion of the *Weltanschauung*—are both necessary to the same degree and therefore of the same historical stature. Christianity could be called historically “Christianity-Paulinism”, and this would indeed be a more exact title. (It is only the belief in the divinity of Christ which has prevented this from happening, but the belief is itself an historical and not a theoretical element.)

### *Questions of Method*

If one wishes to study the birth of a conception of the world which has never been systematically expounded by its founder (and one furthermore whose essential coherence is to be sought not in each individual writing or series of writings but in the whole development of the multiform intellectual work in which the elements of the conception are implicit) some preliminary detailed philological work has to be done. This has to be carried out with the most scrupulous accuracy, scientific honesty and intellectual loyalty and without any preconceptions, apriorism or *parti pris*. It is necessary, first of all, to reconstruct the process of intellectual development of the thinker in question in order to identify those elements which were to become stable and “permanent”—in other words those

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minority in the Italian party, arguing for a full acceptance of the united front policy. Coopted into the CC after the wave of arrests of communist leaders in early 1923, he was violently attacked by Zinoviev at the Fifth World Congress for his revision of Marxism—in the book referred to here by Gramsci. After the incorporation of Tasca into the PCI leadership, the Right ceased to exist in any organised form; Graziadei remained as an isolated figure on the extreme right of the party until he was expelled in 1928.

<sup>5</sup> i.e. Communism. See note 59 on p. 257. For the notion that with the coming of Communism and of the “reign of freedom” Marxism itself will be superseded, see p. 404 and note 59 on p. 367.

which were taken up as the thinker's own thought, distinct from and superior to the "material" which he had studied earlier and which served as a stimulus to him. It is only the former elements which are essential aspects of the process of development. This selection can be made for periods of varying length, determined by intrinsic factors and not by external evidence (though that too can be utilised) and it results in a series of "discards", that is to say of partial doctrines and theories for which the thinker may have had a certain sympathy, at certain times, even to the extent of having accepted them provisionally and of having availed himself of them for his work of criticism and of historical and scientific creation.

It is a matter of common observation among all scholars, from personal experience, that any new theory studied with "heroic fury"<sup>6</sup> (that is, studied not out of mere external curiosity but for reasons of deep interest) for a certain period, especially if one is young, attracts the student of its own accord and takes possession of his whole personality, only to be limited by the study of the next theory, until such a time as a critical equilibrium is created and one learns to study deeply but without succumbing to the fascination of the system and the author under study. These observations are all the more valid the more the thinker in question is endowed with a violent impetus, has a polemical character and is lacking in *esprit de système*, or when one is dealing with a personality in whom theoretical and practical activity are indissolubly intertwined and with an intellect in a process of continual creation and perpetual movement, with a strong and mercilessly vigorous sense of self-criticism.

Given these premisses, the work should be conducted on the following lines:

1. Reconstruction of the author's biography, not only as regards his practical activity, but also and above all as regards his intellectual activity.

2. A catalogue of all his works, even those most easily overlooked, in chronological order, divided according to intrinsic criteria—of intellectual formation, maturity, possession and application of the new way of thinking and of conceiving life and the world. Search for the *Leitmotive*,<sup>7</sup> for the rhythm of the thought as it develops,

<sup>6</sup> The reference is to the *Dell'eroico furore* (1585) of Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), in which a distinction is made between knowledge as contemplation and as active striving or "heroic fury".

<sup>7</sup> Guiding (or leading) motif. The term is most commonly used in connection with music, in particularly with Wagner.

should be more important than that for single casual affirmations and isolated aphorisms.

This preliminary work is needed to make any further research possible. A distinction should further be made within the work of the thinker under consideration between those works which he has carried through to the end and published himself or those which remain unpublished, because incomplete, and those which were published by a friend or disciple, but not without revisions, re-writings, cuts, etc., or in other words not without the active intervention of a publisher or editor. It is clear that the content of posthumous works has to be taken with great discretion and caution, because it cannot be considered definitive but only as material still being elaborated and still provisional. One should not exclude the possibility that these works, particularly if they have been a long time in the making and if the author never decided to finish them, might have been repudiated or deemed unsatisfactory in whole or in part by the author.

In the specific case of the founder of the philosophy of praxis [Marx], the literary work can be distinguished into two categories:

1. Works published under the direct responsibility of the author: among these one should reckon, generally speaking, not only those materially handed over for printing but all those "published" or put into circulation in any way by the author, things like letters, circulars, etc. (a typical example would be the *Notes on the Gotha Programme*, and the Correspondence).

2. Works printed not under the direct responsibility of the author, but posthumously by others: for these works it is as well to have a diplomatic text,<sup>8</sup> as indeed is already being done, or at least a minute description of the original text made according to scientific criteria.

Both sections should be reconstructed according to chronological-critical periods, so that it is possible to establish valid comparisons and not purely mechanical and arbitrary ones.

Minute study and analysis should be devoted to the work of

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<sup>8</sup> A diplomatic edition is one which reproduces exactly the literal text of what an author wrote, as opposed to a critical edition which attempts to produce the best text, emending or correcting the manuscript where necessary. The importance of issuing a diplomatic edition of Marx's work lies in the fact that many of his most important writings, including the second and third volumes of *Capital*, were left in fragmentary or unfinished form at the time of his death. Although Engels at least was a very scrupulous editor, the fact remains, as Gramsci points out below, that he was not Marx and even the best emendations to a manuscript are no substitute for the original itself.

elaboration carried out by the author on the material of the works subsequently printed by the author himself. At the least this study would provide indications and criteria to enable one to evaluate critically the reliability of edited versions of posthumous works compiled by others. The further the preparatory material for the works published by the author is from the definitive text as revised by himself, the less reliable the revision by another hand of similar material. A work can never be identified with the raw material collected for its compilation. It is the definitive choice, the way the component elements are disposed, the greater or lesser importance given to this or that element of those collected in the preparatory phase, which are precisely what constitute the effective work.

Even a study of the correspondence should be carried out with certain precautions: a confident assertion made in a letter would perhaps not be repeated in a book. The stylistic vivacity of the letters, though often artistically more effective than the more measured and considered style of a book, can sometimes lead to weaknesses in the argument. In letters, as in speeches or in conversations, *logical errors* occur more frequently: the greater rapidity of thought is often achieved at the expense of its solidity.

Only at the secondary level, in the study of an original and innovating form of thought, should one consider the contribution of other people to its documentation. It is in this way, at least as a general principle and as method, that the question of the relationship of homogeneity between the two founders of the philosophy of praxis [Marx and Engels] should be posed. When one or other makes an affirmation on their reciprocal agreement, this affirmation is valid only for the subject in question. Even the fact that one of them has written some chapters for a book written by the other is not an absolute reason why the book should be considered the result of a perfect agreement. There is no need to underrate the contribution of the second [Engels] but there is no need either to identify the second with the first [Engels with Marx] nor should one think that everything attributed by [Engels] to [Marx] is absolutely authentic and free from infiltration. It is certain that [Engels] demonstrates a disinterest and a lack of personal vanity which are unique in the history of literature, but this is not the point: nor is it a question of doubting [Engels's] absolute scientific honesty. The point is that [Engels] is not [Marx], and that if one wants to know [Marx] one must look for him above all in his authentic works, those published under his direct responsibility. From these observations there derive a number of warnings about

method and some indications for related research. For example, what would be the value of Rodolfo Mondolfo's book<sup>9</sup> on the historical materialism of F[rederick] E[ngels], published by Formaggini in 1912? In a letter to Croce, Sorel expresses doubts whether, given Eng[els]'s scant capacities as an original thinker, such a subject can be studied, and he frequently repeats that one should not confuse the two authors. Apart from the question raised by Sorel, it would seem that for the very reason that (apparently) it is asserted that the second of the two friends has scant capacities as a theoretician (or at least occupies a subaltern position in relation to the first), it is indispensable to study who is responsible for the original thought. In reality, apart from Mondolfo's book, no systematic research of this type has been undertaken in the world of culture. Indeed, [Engels's] expositions, some of which are relatively systematic, have by now been given a position in the front rank as an authentic source, and indeed as the only authentic source. For this reason Mondolfo's volume seems very useful, at least for the guiding line which it traces.

#### *Antonio Labriola*<sup>10</sup>

One very useful thing would be an objective and systematic *résumé* (even of a scholastic-analytical kind) of all the publications of Antonio Labriola on the philosophy of praxis to replace the volumes no longer available. A work of this kind is a necessary preliminary for any initiative aimed at putting back into circulation Labriola's philosophical position, which is very little known outside a restricted circle. It is amazing that Leo Bronstein [Trotsky] in his memoirs<sup>11</sup> should speak of Labriola's "dilettantism". This judgment is incomprehensible (unless it is a reference to the gap between theory and practice in Labriola as a person, which would not appear to be the case) except as an unconscious reflection of the pseudo-scientific pedantry of the German intellectual group that was so influential in Russia. In reality Labriola, who affirms that the

<sup>9</sup> Roberto Mondolfo, *Il materialismo storico in Federico Engels*, Genoa, 1912. For a possible influence of Mondolfo's Hegelian-Marxist theory of praxis on Gramsci's "philosophy of praxis" see General Introduction.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of Antonio Labriola (1843-1904), the most important of early Italian Marxists and a vital influence on Gramsci's philosophical thought, see General Introduction.

<sup>11</sup> The reference to Labriola comes in *My Life* (1930), a book which Gramsci was able to read in prison only because it was written after Trotsky's expulsion from the Soviet Union and therefore, apparently, did not come into the forbidden category of "political agitation".

philosophy of praxis is independent of any other philosophical current, is self-sufficient and is the only man who has attempted to build up the philosophy of praxis scientifically.

The dominant tendency manifested itself in two main currents:

1. The so-called orthodox tendency, represented by Plekhanov<sup>12</sup> (cf. his *Fundamental Problems [of Marxism]*), who, in reality, despite his assertions to the contrary, relapses into vulgar materialism. The problem of the "origins" of Marx's thought has not been properly considered: a detailed study of his philosophical culture (and of the general philosophical environment in which he was formed directly and indirectly) is certainly necessary, but only as the premiss for a far more important study, that of his own "original" philosophy, which cannot be exhausted by study of a few "sources" or his personal "culture". It is necessary, first of all, to take account of his creative and constructive activity. The way in which Plekhanov poses the problem is typical of the positivist method, and demonstrates his meagre speculative and historiographical ability.

2. The orthodox tendency has determined the growth of its opposite: the tendency to connect the philosophy of praxis to Kantianism and to other non-positivist and non-materialist philosophical tendencies. This reached its "agnostic" conclusion with Otto Bauer,<sup>13</sup> who writes in his book on religion that Marxism can be supported and integrated by any philosophy, even Thomism.<sup>14</sup> This second tendency is not really a tendency in the strict sense, but an *ensemble* of all the tendencies—including even the Freudianism of De Man—that do not accept the so-called "orthodoxy" of Germanic pedantry.

Why is it that Labriola and his way of posing the philosophical problem has enjoyed such a limited fortune? One could repeat here what Rosa [Luxemburg] said about critical economy [*Capital*] and its most refined problems:<sup>15</sup> in the romantic period of struggle, the

<sup>12</sup> Georgy Valentinovich Plekhanov (1857–1918), Marxist philosopher, active in the Russian Social-Democratic movement in the latter years of the nineteenth century and then after 1903 aligned with the Menshevik faction. As a philosopher Plekhanov continued to be esteemed by the Bolsheviks, both before and after the Revolution, and he represents an essential link in the chain of orthodox materialist thought which Gramsci is combating. *The Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, called by Lenin the finest exposition of Marxism, was first published in 1908.

<sup>13</sup> Otto Bauer (1882–1938) was an Austrian Social Democrat and a leading exponent of the tendency known as Austro-Marxism (see note 19 on p. 389). His views on the compatibility of Marxist economics with Thomist epistemology are to be found in the volume *Sozialdemokratie, Religion und Kirche* (1927).

<sup>14</sup> Thomism: i.e. the scholastic philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas (1224–74).

<sup>15</sup> In the article *Stagnation and Progress in Marxism* (see note 25 on p. 392).

period of popular *Sturm und Drang*,<sup>16</sup> all interest is focussed on the most immediate weapons and on tactical problems in the political field and on minor cultural problems in the philosophical field. But from the moment in which a subaltern group becomes really autonomous and hegemonic, thus bringing into being a new form of State, we experience the concrete birth of a need to construct a new intellectual and moral order, that is, a new type of society, and hence the need to develop more universal concepts and more refined and decisive ideological weapons. That is why it is necessary to bring Labriola back into circulation and to make his way of posing the philosophical problem predominant. One can thus open the struggle for an autonomous and superior culture, the positive part of the struggle whose negative and polemical manifestations bear names with “a-”privative and “anti-”—a-theism, anti-clericalism etc. One thus gives a modern and contemporary form to the traditional secular humanism which must be the ethical basis of the new type of State.\*

### *The Philosophy of Praxis and Modern Culture*

The philosophy of praxis has been a “moment”<sup>17</sup> of modern culture. To a certain extent it has determined or enriched certain cultural currents. Study of this fact, which is very important and full of significance, has been neglected or quite simply ignored by the so-called orthodoxy, and for this reason: the most important philosophical combination that has taken place has been between the philosophy of praxis and various idealistic tendencies, a fact which, to the so-called orthodoxy, essentially bound to a particular cultural current of the last quarter of the last century (positivism, scientism), has seemed an absurdity if not actually a piece of chicanery. (In Plekhanov’s essay on *Fundamentals* the fact is, admittedly, referred to, but it is hardly touched upon and with no attempt at a critical explanation.) For this reason it would appear necessary to re-evaluate the consideration of the problem as attempted by Antonio Labriola.

<sup>16</sup> *Sturm und Drang* (literally “storm and stress”): a German pre-Romantic literary movement, hence by extension any turbulent period in cultural life.

\* An analytical and systematic treatment of Antonio Labriola’s philosophical conception could become the philosophical part of an ordinary magazine (*Voce, Leonardo, Ordine Nuovo*). An international bibliography on Labriola (*Neue Zeit*, etc.) should also be compiled.

<sup>17</sup> As frequently in Gramsci, the word “moment” [*momento*] is here being used in a sense that combines the temporal “moment of time” with the ideas of “aspect” or “feature”, and of “motive force”. (See also Note on Gramsci’s Terminology, p. xiii.)

What happened is this: the philosophy of praxis has undergone in reality a double revision, that is to say it has been subsumed into a double philosophical combination. On the one hand, certain of its elements, explicitly or implicitly, have been absorbed and incorporated by a number of idealist currents (one need mention only Croce, Gentile, Sorel, Bergson even, pragmatism).<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the so-called orthodoxy, concerned to find a philosophy which, according to their extremely limited viewpoint, was more comprehensive than just a "simple" interpretation of history, have believed themselves orthodox in identifying this philosophy fundamentally with traditional materialism. Another current has gone back to Kantianism (here one can mention, apart from Professor Max Adler<sup>19</sup> in Vienna, the Italian professors Alfredo Poggi and Adelchi Baratonio).<sup>20</sup> It can be observed, in general terms, that the currents which have attempted combinations of the philosophy of praxis with idealist tendencies consist for the most part of "pure" intellectuals, whereas the current which has constituted the orthodoxy consisted of intellectual personalities more markedly dedicated to practical activity and therefore more closely linked (with more or less extrinsic links) to the great popular masses (a fact which,

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<sup>18</sup> For the influence of Marxism on Croce, initially considerable, then reduced to that of a "simple canon of historical research", see B. Croce, *Materialismo storico ed economia marxistica* (first published 1900: Volume II, 4 of Collected Works). For Gentile see *La filosofia di Marx, Studi critici*, Pisa, 1899, in which Gentile shows himself a devotee of the Young Marx, interpreted in a very idealist fashion. As for Sorel, the Marxist residues, implicit and explicit, in his later syndicalist theory are fairly transparent, even when he is at his most polemical. Such cannot be claimed, however, for either Bergson or the Pragmatists, in whose writings Marxism appears, if at all, only as part of a general heritage of current ideas.

<sup>19</sup> Max Adler (1873-1937), Austrian sociologist and Social Democrat theoretician, together with Otto Bauer (see note 13 above) and Rolf Hilferding one of the leading exponents of Austro-Marxism (from 1904). The Austro-Marxists, who represented the "orthodox" thinking of the Second International, in opposition both to Lenin and to the revisionism of Bernstein, laid particular stress on the scientific aspects of Marx's work, at the expense of the element of revolutionary praxis. Having found in Marx only the objective laws of the development of society, in a strictly value-free sense, they tended to look for their values and for reasons for political choices, not in the immanent laws of the dialectic itself, but in the transcendental ethics of Kant.

<sup>20</sup> Social-Democratic theoreticians. Of Baratonio (1875-1947), the more important of the two and once defined by the Reformist Socialist leader Turati as "the philosopher of the leadership of our Party", Gramsci wrote (*Ordine Nuovo*, 17 January 1922): "The revolutionary verbalism of the Rt. Hon. Adelchi Baratonio has no parallel except in the philosophical verbalism of Professor Adelchi Baratonio, pedagogue. . . . Baratonio's interior life, his capacity for understanding, the activity of his imagination, show him as nothing other than the tape-worm of a political and philosophical culture that he has absorbed as a reader of books and newspapers."



however, has not prevented the majority of them from performing somersaults of no small historico-political consequence).

The distinction has considerable importance. The "pure" intellectuals, acting as the elaborators of the most widespread ideologies of the dominant classes and as *leaders*<sup>21</sup> of the intellectual groups in their countries, could not fail to make use of at least some elements of the philosophy of praxis, to give strength to their conceptions and moderate an excess of speculative philosophism with the historicist realism of the new theory and to provide new arms for the arsenal of the social group with which they were linked. The orthodox tendency, on the other hand, found itself involved in a struggle against the ideology most widespread amongst the popular masses, religious transcendentalism, and reckoned to overcome this only with the crudest and most banal materialism. But this materialism was itself a far from indifferent stratum of common sense, kept alive, to a much greater degree than was thought then or is thought today, by religion itself, which has its expression among the people in a low and trivial form, full of superstition and witchcraft, in which matter plays no small role.

Labriola distinguishes himself from both currents by his affirmation (not always, admittedly, unequivocal) that the philosophy of praxis is an independent and original philosophy which contains in itself the elements of a further development, so as to become, from an interpretation of history, a general philosophy. This is the direction in which one must work, developing Antonio Labriola's position, which Rodolfo Mondolfo's books (as far as I remember) do not seem to develop coherently.\*

Why has the philosophy of praxis had this fate of having served to form combinations between its principal elements and either idealism or philosophical materialism? Research into this cannot but be complex and delicate; it requires a lot of finesse in analysis and intellectual sobriety. For it is very easy to be deceived by external similarities and not to see hidden similarities and necessary but camouflaged connections. The identification of the concepts which the philosophy of praxis has "yielded up" to traditional philosophies, and thanks to which these latter have enjoyed a brief moment of

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<sup>21</sup> In English in the text.

\* It seems that Mondolfo has never completely abandoned the fundamentally positivist point of view of a pupil of Roberto Ardigò. The book by Mondolfo's disciple, Diambrini Palazzi (with preface by Mondolfo) on the philosophy of Antonio Labriola,<sup>22</sup> is evidence of the poverty of concepts and guidelines of Mondolfo's own university teaching.

<sup>22</sup> S. Diambrini Palazzi, *Il pensiero filosofico di Antonio Labriola*, Bologna s.d. [1923]

rejuvenation, must be made with great critical caution, and it means no more nor less than writing the history of modern culture since the activity of its founders [Marx and Engels].

Clearly, explicit absorption is not hard to track down, though that too must be critically analysed. A classical example is that represented by the Crocean reduction of the philosophy of praxis to an empirical canon of historical research. This concept, which has penetrated even among the Catholics (cf. Monsignor Olgiati's book) has contributed to the creation of the economico-juridical school of Italian historiography,<sup>23</sup> which has spread beyond the frontiers of Italy. But the most difficult and delicate research is that into implicit and unacknowledged absorption, which has taken place precisely because the philosophy of praxis has been a moment of modern culture, a diffuse atmosphere, which has modified old ways of thinking through actions and reactions which are neither apparent nor immediate. A study of Sorel is particularly interesting from this point of view, because through Sorel and his fortunes one can obtain many relevant indications. The same could be said for Croce. But the most important study, it seems to me, should be that of Bergsonian philosophy and of pragmatism, in order to find out to what extent certain of their positions would be inconceivable without the historical link of the philosophy of praxis.

Another aspect of the question is the practical lesson in the science of politics which the philosophy of praxis has given even to those of its opponents who contest it bitterly on principle, just as the Jesuits contested Machiavelli in theory while remaining in practice his best disciples. In an "Opinion" published in *La Stampa* at the time when he was its Rome correspondent (about 1925), Mario Missiroli<sup>24</sup> writes more or less that it would be interesting to know whether in their heart of hearts the more intelligent industrialists were not convinced that the "Critical Economy" [*Capital*] contained very good insights into their affairs, and

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<sup>23</sup> Members of this school included Gaetano Salvemini, Gioacchino Volpe, Niccolò Rodolico and Romolo Caggese. With the victory of fascism the school broke up, Salvemini, a Socialist, going into exile and Volpe becoming an historian of the régime.

<sup>24</sup> The figure of Mario Missiroli (b. 1886), historian, journalist and editor, appears to have exercised a peculiar fascination on Gramsci and references to him abound throughout the *Quaderni*. In a sense Gramsci sees him as the type-figure of the bourgeois Italian intellectual, prevented by a natural facility and superficiality and by the general conditions of Italian intellectual life from any consistent application of his considerable talent, and a willing victim, despite his brilliance, of intellectual and political fashions. (See, in particular the short text entitled *Gli intellettuali: la decadenza di Mario Missiroli*, PP. pp. 110-12.)

whether they do not take advantage of the lessons thus acquired. This would not be in any way surprising, for if [Marx] has analysed reality exactly then he has done nothing other than systematise rationally and coherently what the historical agents of this reality felt and still feel in a confused and instinctive way, and of which they have a clearer consciousness as a result of the hostile critique.

A further aspect of the question is even more interesting. Why is it that even the so-called orthodoxy has combined the philosophy of praxis with other philosophies, and prevalently with one in particular rather than with others? In fact the one that counts is the combination with traditional materialism; the combination with Kantianism has had only a limited success and only among certain restricted intellectual groups. On this question it is worth looking at Rosa [Luxemburg]'s essay on progress and stagnation in the development of the philosophy of praxis,<sup>25</sup> where she notes how the constituent parts of this philosophy have developed in varying degrees, but always following the necessities of practical activity. This implies that the founders of the new philosophy were a long way ahead of the necessities of their period and even of the period that followed, and that they created an arsenal stocked with weapons which were still not ready for use, because ahead of their time, and which were to be ready for service only some time later. The explanation is somewhat arbitrary in that to a large extent all it does is to present an abstract formulation of the fact to be explained as an explanation of the fact itself. None the less it contains a nugget of truth which is worth exploring in depth. One of the historical reasons can, it seems to me, be looked for in the fact that the philosophy of praxis has been forced to ally itself with extraneous tendencies in order to combat the residues of the pre-capitalist world that still exist among the popular masses, especially in the field of religion.

The philosophy of praxis had two tasks to perform: to combat modern ideologies in their most refined form, in order to be able to constitute its own group of independent intellectuals; and to educate the popular masses, whose culture was medieval. This second task, which was fundamental, given the character of the new philosophy, has absorbed all its strength, not only in quantitative but also in qualitative terms. For "didactic" reasons, the new philosophy was combined into a form of culture which was a

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<sup>25</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *Stillstand und Fortschritt im Marxismus*, first published in *Vorwärts* on 14 March 1903, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Marx' death.

little higher than the popular average (which was very low) but was absolutely inadequate to combat the ideologies of the educated classes. And yet the new philosophy was born precisely to supersede the highest cultural manifestation of the age, classical German philosophy, and to create a group of intellectuals specific to the new social group whose conception of the world it was. On the other side, modern culture, especially that marked by idealism, does not manage to elaborate a popular culture or to give a moral and scientific content to its own school programmes, which remain abstract and theoretical schemas.<sup>26</sup> It remains the culture of a restricted intellectual aristocracy, which exercises a hold on youth only rarely and to the extent that it becomes immediate (and occasional)<sup>27</sup> politics.

It remains to be seen whether this form of cultural alignment of forces might not be an historical necessity, and whether one would not find similar alignments in past history, allowing for particular circumstances of time and place. The classical example, previous to the modern period, is undoubtedly that of the Renaissance in Italy and the Reformation in the Protestant countries. On Page 11 of his book *Storia dell'età barocca in Italia*<sup>28</sup> Croce writes:

"The movement of the Renaissance remained an aristocratic movement and one of élite circles, and even in Italy, which was both mother and nurse to the movement, it did not escape from courtly circles, it did not penetrate to the people or become custom and 'prejudice', in other words collective persuasion and faith. The Reformation, on the other hand, did indeed possess this efficacy of popular penetration, but it paid for it with a retarding of its intrinsic development, with the slow and often interrupted maturation of its vital germ."

And again on Page 8:

"Luther, like those humanists, deplores sadness and celebrates gaiety, he condemns idleness and commands work: but, on the

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<sup>26</sup> Gramsci would appear here particularly to have in mind the reform of the Italian school system carried out under the aegis of the idealist philosopher and Fascist Minister of Education, Giovanni Gentile, in 1923. A major feature of the  *riforma Gentile* as it affected humanistic education in secondary schools was its attempt to provide a rapid synthesis of the whole of Italian "high culture", seen in the light of the development of the national ideal. (See also introduction to "On Education", p. 24.)

<sup>27</sup> *occasionale*: meaning, as often in Gramsci, "occasional" not in the temporal sense but in that of "inorganic" or "peripheral".

<sup>28</sup> B. Croce, *Storia dell'età barocca in Italia* (first published 1929: Volume III, 23 of Collected Works). In the Collected Works edition the quotation given by Gramsci as on p. 11 is in fact on p. 12.

other hand, he is led to an attitude of diffidence and hostility towards letters and study, so that Erasmus could say '*ubicumque regnat lutheranismus, ibi literarum est interitus*' [wherever Lutheranism reigns, there is the death of letters]. Certainly, if not just as the effect solely of the aversion adopted by its founder, German protestantism was for a couple of centuries all but sterile in the field of study, criticism, and philosophy. The Italian reformers, notably those of the circle of Juan de Valdés and their friends, managed however, to combine without stress humanism and mysticism, the cult of study and moral austerity. Calvinism, with its harsh conception of Grace and its harsh discipline, did not favour the free search for knowledge and the cult of beauty either, but it acquired the role, by interpreting, developing and adapting the concept of Grace into that of vocation, of energetically promoting economic life, production and the increase of wealth."

The Lutheran Reformation and Calvinism created a vast national-popular movement through which their influence spread: only in later periods did they create a higher culture. The Italian reformers were infertile of any major historical success.<sup>29</sup> It is true that even the Reformation, in its higher phase, necessarily adopted the style of the Renaissance and as such spread even in non-protestant countries where the movement had not had a popular incubation. But the phase of popular development enabled the protestant countries to resist the crusade of the Catholic armies tenaciously and victoriously. Thus there was born the German nation as one of the most vigorous in modern Europe. France was lacerated by the wars of religion leading to an apparent victory of Catholicism, but it experienced a great popular reformation in the eighteenth century with the Enlightenment, Voltairianism and the Encyclopaedia. This reformation preceded and accompanied the Revolution of 1789. It really was a matter here of a great intellectual and moral reformation of the French people, more complete than the German Lutheran Reformation, because it also embraced the great peasant masses in the countryside and had a distinct secular basis and attempted to replace religion with a completely secular ideology

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<sup>29</sup> For this thesis compare what Gramsci writes elsewhere (Ris. pp. 33-34) on the subject of the Reformation in Italy: "It must be observed that in Italy, unlike other countries, not even religion acted as an element of cohesion between people and intellectuals, and that for this very reason the philosophical crisis of the intellectuals did not extend to the people, because it did not originate from the people and there did not exist a 'national-popular bloc' in the religious field."

represented by the national and patriotic bond. Not even this reformation had an immediate flowering of high culture, except in political science in the form of the positive science of right.\*

A conception of the philosophy of praxis as a modern popular reformation (since those people who expect a religious reformation in Italy, a new Italian edition of Calvinism, like Missiroli and Co., are living in cloud-cuckooland) was perhaps hinted at by Georges Sorel, but his vision was fragmentary and intellectualistic, because of his kind of Jansenist fury against the squalor of parliamentarism and political parties. Sorel has taken from Renan the concept of the necessity of an intellectual and moral reformation; he has affirmed (in a letter to Missiroli) that great historical movements are often represented by a modern culture, etc. It seems to me, though, that a conception of this kind is implicit in Sorel when he uses primitive Christianity as a touchstone, in a rather literary way it is true, but nevertheless with more than a grain of truth; with mechanical and often contrived references, but nevertheless with occasional flashes of profound intuition.

The philosophy of praxis presupposes all this cultural past: Renaissance and Reformation, German philosophy and the French Revolution, Calvinism and English classical economics, secular liberalism and this historicism which is at the root of the whole modern conception of life. The philosophy of praxis is the crowning point of this entire movement of intellectual and moral reformation, made dialectical in the contrast between popular culture and high culture. It corresponds to the nexus Protestant Reformation plus French Revolution: it is a philosophy which is also politics, and a politics which is also philosophy. It is still going through its populist<sup>31</sup> phase: creating a group of independent intellectuals is not an easy thing; it requires a long process, with actions and reactions, coming

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\* Compare here the comparison made by Hegel of the particular national forms assumed by the same culture in France and Germany in the period of the French Revolution: this Hegelian conception, at the end of a rather long chain, led to the famous verses of Carducci: "... *con opposta fé/Decapitaro, Emmanuel Kant, Iddio/Massimilian Robespierre, il re*". [With opposing faiths/Immanuel Kant cut off the head of God/and Maximilian Robespierre, that of the King].<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> In the poem *Versaglia*, vv. 50-2 (G. Carducci, *Giambi ed Epodi*). See also MS. p. 65, where Gramsci claims that Carducci drew the idea from Heine, but that it originated earlier, with Hegel; and the letter to Tatiana Schucht of 30 May 1932 (LC, p. 629), where he writes: "Thus, in his Lectures on the History of Philosophy, he [Hegel] discovered a nexus between the French Revolution and the philosophy of Kant, Fichte and Schelling."

<sup>31</sup> The Italian word here is *popolaresco*, which is a derivative of *popolare* ("popular") and does not quite correspond to "populist", e.g. as applied to the Narodniks, for which the Italian word is *populista*.

together and drifting apart and the growth of very numerous and complex new formations. It is the conception of a subaltern social group, deprived of historical initiative, in continuous but disorganic expansion, unable to go beyond a certain qualitative level, which still remains below the level of the possession of the State and of the real exercise of hegemony over the whole of society which alone permits a certain organic equilibrium in the development of the intellectual group. The philosophy of praxis has itself become "prejudice" and "superstition". As it stands, it is the popular aspect of modern historicism, but it contains in itself the principle through which this historicism can be superseded. In the history of culture, which is much broader than the history of philosophy, every time that there has been a flowering of popular culture because a revolutionary phase was being passed through and because the metal of a new class was being forged from the ore of the people, there has been a flowering of "materialism": conversely, at the same time the traditional classes clung to philosophies of the spirit. Hegel, half-way between the French Revolution and the Restoration, gave dialectical form to the two moments of the life of thought, materialism and spiritualism, but his synthesis was "a man walking on his head".<sup>32</sup> Hegel's successors destroyed this unity and there was a return to materialist systems on the one side and spiritualist on the other. The philosophy of praxis, through its founder, relived all this experience of Hegelianism, Feuerbachianism and French materialism, in order to reconstruct the synthesis of dialectical unity, "the man walking on his feet". The laceration which happened to Hegelianism has been repeated with the philosophy of praxis. That is to say, from dialectical unity there has been a regress to philosophical materialism on the one hand, while on the other hand modern idealist high culture has tried to incorporate that part of the philosophy of praxis which was needed in order for it to find a new elixir.

"Politically" the materialist conception is close to the people, to "common sense". It is closely linked to many beliefs and prejudices, to almost all popular superstitions (witchcraft, spirits, etc.). This can be seen in popular Catholicism, and, even more so, in Byzantine orthodoxy. Popular religion is crassly materialistic, and yet the

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<sup>32</sup> The image of the Hegelian dialectic as a man "standing on his head" is frequent in Marx and Engels (Marx, Afterword to the Second German Edition of *Capital Vol. I*, and, earlier, *Holy Family* VIII, 4: Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, 4), and is in fact a turning against Hegel of a phrase used by Hegel himself in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

official religion of the intellectuals attempts to impede the formation of two distinct religions, two separate strata, so as not to become officially, as well as in reality, an ideology of restricted groups. But from this point of view it is important not to confuse the attitude of the philosophy of praxis with that of Catholicism. Whereas the former maintains a dynamic contact and tends continually to raise new strata of the population to a higher cultural life, the latter tends to maintain a purely mechanical contact, an external unity based in particular on the liturgy and on a cult visually imposing to the crowd. Many heretical movements were manifestations of popular forces aiming to reform the Church and bring it closer to the people by exalting them. The reaction of the Church was often very violent: it has created the Society of Jesus; it has clothed itself in the protective armour of the Council of Trent; although it has organised a marvellous mechanism of "democratic" selection of its intellectuals, they have been selected as single individuals and not as the representative expression of popular groups.

In the history of cultural developments, it is important to pay special attention to the organisation of culture and the personnel through whom this organisation takes concrete form. G. De Ruggiero's volume on Renaissance and Reformation<sup>33</sup> brings out the attitude of very many intellectuals, with Erasmus<sup>34</sup> at their head: they gave way in the face of persecution and the stake. The bearer of the Reformation was therefore the German people itself in its totality, as undifferentiated mass, not the intellectuals. It is precisely this desertion of the intellectuals in the face of the enemy which explains the "sterility" of the Reformation in the immediate sphere of high culture, until, by a process of selection, the people, which remained faithful to the cause, produced a new group of intellectuals culminating in classical philosophy.

Something similar has happened up to now with the philosophy of praxis. The great intellectuals formed on the terrain of this philosophy, besides being few in number, were not linked with the people, they did not emerge from the people, but were the expression of traditional intermediary classes, to which they returned at the great "turning points" of history. Some remained, but rather to subject the new conception to a systematic revision than to advance

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<sup>33</sup> Guido De Ruggiero, *Rinascimento, riforma, controriforma*, Bari, 1930.

<sup>34</sup> Erasmus of Rotterdam (1465-1536), Dutch humanist and reformer, shared with the Lutherans a moral and theological critique of Catholic institutions, but was not prepared, whether for reasons of principle or personal safety, to commit himself totally to the reforming camp.



its autonomous development. The affirmation that the philosophy is a new, independent and original conception, even though it is also a moment of world historical development, is an affirmation of the independence and originality of a new culture in incubation, which will develop with the development of social relations. What exists at any given time is a variable combination of old and new, a momentary equilibrium of cultural relations corresponding to the equilibrium of social relations. Only after the creation of the new State does the cultural problem impose itself in all its complexity and tend towards a coherent solution. In any case the attitude to be taken up before the formation of the new State can only be critical-polemical, never dogmatic; it must be a romantic attitude, but of a romanticism which is consciously aspiring to its classical synthesis.

*Note I.* One should study the period of the Restoration<sup>35</sup> as the period of the elaboration of all modern historicist doctrines, including the philosophy of praxis, which is their crowning point and which was in any case elaborated just on the eve of 1848, when Restoration was crumbling on every side and the Holy Alliance was falling to pieces. It is well known that restoration is only a metaphorical expression; in reality there was no effective restoration of the *ancien régime*, but only a new alignment of forces through which the revolutionary conquests of the middle classes were limited and codified. The King in France and the Pope in Rome became heads of their respective parties and no longer the unquestioned representatives of France or of Christianity. The position of the Pope was particularly shaken. In this period begins the formation of permanent organisms of "militant Catholics", which, after sundry intermediary stages—1848–49, 1861, (year of the first disintegration of the Papal State with the annexation of the Emilian Legations), 1870 and the post-war period—were to become the powerful organisation of Catholic Action, powerful but in a defensive position. The historicist theories of the Restoration opposed the eighteenth century ideologies, abstract and utopistic, which remain alive as proletarian philosophy, ethics and politics, particularly widespread in France up to 1870. The philosophy of praxis was opposed to these eighteenth century popular conceptions as a mass philosophy, in all their forms, from the most infantile to that of Proudhon. (Proudhon's conception underwent a certain grafting of conservative historicism,

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<sup>35</sup> i.e. the period of European history that goes from the fall of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna in 1815 up to the time of the 1848 revolutions.

and he can perhaps be called the French Gioberti,<sup>36</sup> but from the popular classes—Italian history being backward in relation to French, as can be seen from the period of 1848.) If the conservative historicists, theorists of the old, are well placed to criticise the utopian character of the mummified Jacobin ideologies, philosophers of praxis are better placed to appreciate the real and not abstract value that Jacobinism had as an element in the creation of the new French nation (that is to say as a fact of circumscribed activity in specific circumstances and not as something ideologised) and are better placed also to appreciate the historical role of the conservatives themselves, who were in reality the shame-faced children of the Jacobins, who damned their excesses while carefully administering their heritage. The philosophy of praxis not only claimed to explain and to justify all the past, but to explain and justify historically itself as well. That is, it was the greatest form of “historicism”, total liberation from any form of abstract “ideologism”, the real conquest of the historical world, the beginnings of a new civilisation.

*Speculative Immanence and Historicist or Realist Immanence*

It is affirmed that the philosophy of praxis was born on the terrain of the highest development of culture in the first half of the nineteenth century, this culture being represented by classical German philosophy, English classical economics and French political literature and practice. These three cultural movements are at the origin of the philosophy of praxis.<sup>37</sup> But in what sense is the affirmation to be understood? That each of these movements has

<sup>36</sup> Vincenzo Gioberti (1801–52) was a leading moderate during the Risorgimento, and the parallel with Proudhon, which is a favourite one with Gramsci (see, for example, p. 108 of this volume), is at first sight surprising. As is made clear however elsewhere (MS. p. 185) the parallel relates to their positions within the French working-class movement and the “more backward” Italian liberal-national movement respectively. Within this context Gioberti appears, in a curious way, as the more radical figure. Whereas in Proudhon the conservative element gradually comes to take precedence over the Jacobin (to use Gramsci’s term), with Gioberti the process is reversed. In his *Rinnovamento civile dell’Italia* (1851), written towards the end of his life and just after the abortive revolutions of 1848 and the consequent blood-bath of repression, Gioberti comes to take up position in favour of a massive renewal of the popular forces in alliance with the liberal bourgeois intelligentsia, a position far more advanced in relation to its time and place than Proudhon’s hardly dialectical oscillations between utopian socialism and acceptance of the bourgeois order.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Lenin’s *The Three Sources and Three Component Parts* (1913): “The Marxian doctrine . . . is the legitimate successor of the best that was created by humanity in the nineteenth century in the shape of German philosophy, English political economy and French socialism.”

contributed respectively to the elaboration of the philosophy, the economics and the politics of the philosophy of praxis? Or that the philosophy of praxis has synthesised the three movements, that is, the entire culture of the age, and that in the new synthesis, whichever "moment" one is examining, the theoretical, the economic, or the political, one will find each of the three movements present as a preparatory "moment"? This is what seems to me to be the case. And it seems to me that the unitary "moment" of synthesis is to be identified in the new concept of immanence, which has been translated from the speculative form, as put forward by classical German philosophy, into a historicist form with the aid of French politics and English classical economics.

As far as concerns the substantial identity between German philosophical language and French political language, see the notes above.<sup>38</sup> But it seems to me that one of the most interesting and fecund subjects for research yet to be carried out concerns the relationship between German philosophy, French politics and English classical economics. One could say in a sense, I think, that the philosophy of praxis equals Hegel plus David Ricardo.<sup>39</sup> The

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<sup>38</sup> See the section *Traducibilità dei linguaggi scientifici e filosofici*, MS. pp. 63-71.

<sup>39</sup> David Ricardo (1772-1823), celebrated English political economist much admired but also severely criticised by Marx, notably in *Capital*. In the *Theories on Surplus Value* Marx sums up the importance of Ricardo's discoveries under two main heads, the theory that value is determined by labour time and his demonstration of the economic roots of the class struggle. What interests Gramsci, however, here and below (p. 412) is less Ricardo's conclusions than his methodological innovations. But, as he admits in the letter to Tatiana of 30 May 1932 (cited above: LC. p. 629), he is here following an intuition rather than a certainty, and it is in fact doubtful whether either the "law of tendency" (see next note) or the concepts of *homo oeconomicus* (economic man) and "determined market" should properly be attributed to Ricardo at all. As far as the latter concepts are concerned, it seems better to situate them, as Gramsci implicitly does on other occasions (in his *Noterelle di economia*, MS. pp. 259-83), in the context of the debate between "critical" (i.e. Marxist) economy and the "pure" economics of the turn of the century. On MS. p. 266 Gramsci defines economic man as "the abstraction of the economic activity of a particular form of society, that is of a particular economic structure", and he goes on to say (MS. p. 267): "it can be said that such an abstraction is by no means necessarily extra-historical and is by no means of the same nature as economic abstractions. *Homo oeconomicus* is the abstraction of the needs and of the economic operations of a particular form of society, just as the *ensemble* of hypotheses put forward by economists in their scientific work is nothing other than the *ensemble* of premises that are at the base of a particular form of society." And on "determined market" (*mercato determinato*) (MS. p. 269): "Determined market in pure economics is an arbitrary abstraction, which has a purely conventional value for the purposes of a pedantic and scholastic analysis. For critical economy on the other hand it should be the *ensemble* of the concrete economic activities of a determined social form, activities subsumed according to their laws of uniformity which are abstract laws but not such that the abstraction ceases to be historically determined."

problem should be presented thus at the outset: are the new methodological canons introduced by Ricardo in the science of economics to be considered as merely instrumental values (alternatively as a new chapter of formal logic), or do they have a significance as a philosophical innovation? The discovery of the formal logical principle of the "law of tendency"<sup>40</sup> which leads to the scientific definition of the fundamental economic concepts of *homo oeconomicus* and of the "determined market", was this not also a discovery of epistemological value as well? Does it not precisely imply a new "immanence", a new conception of "necessity" and of freedom, etc.? Translation into these terms seems to me precisely the achievement of the philosophy of praxis, which has universalised Ricardo's discoveries, extending them in an adequate fashion to the whole of history and thus drawing from them, in an original form, a new conception of the world.

A whole series of questions will have to be studied:

1. to summarise Ricardo's formal scientific principles in their form of empirical canons.

2. to look for the historical origin of these Ricardian principles, which are connected with the rise of economic science itself, that is, to the development of the bourgeoisie as a "concrete world class" and to the subsequent formation of a world market which was already sufficiently "dense" in complex movements for it to be possible to isolate and study necessary laws of regularity. (It should be said that these are laws of tendency which are not laws in the naturalistic sense or that of speculative determinism, but in a "historicist" sense, valid, that is, to the extent that there exists the "determined market" or in other words an environment which is organically alive and interconnected in its movements of development. Economics studies these laws of tendency in so far as they are quantitative expressions of phenomena; in the passage from economics to general history the concept of quantity is integrated with that of quality and of the dialectic quality-that-becomes-quality).\*

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<sup>40</sup> For Gramsci's analysis of laws of tendency as having "a real 'historical' and not just a methodological character", see his note on the Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall on MS. pp. 211-15. Here Gramsci also criticises Croce for giving an "absolute" rather than a dialectical historical value to the law—a criticism which, curiously, parallels Marx's criticism of Ricardo in *Capital* (III, 15). See too note 3 on p. 280.

\* *Quantity Necessity: Quality Freedom*. The dialectic (the dialectical nexus) of Quantity Quality is identical with that of necessity freedom.

3. to establish the connection of Ricardo with Hegel and Robespierre.

4. to consider how the philosophy of praxis has arrived, from the synthesis of the three living currents to the new conception of immanence, purified of any trace of transcendence and theology.

Alongside the research outlined above must be put that concerning the attitude of the philosophy of praxis towards the contemporary continuations of classical German philosophy as represented by the modern Italian idealist philosophy of Croce and Gentile. How are we to understand Engels' proposition on the inheritance of classical German philosophy?<sup>41</sup> Is it to be understood as a historical circle already completed, in which the vital part of Hegelianism has already been definitively absorbed once and for all; or should it rather be understood as a historical process still in motion in which the necessity for a philosophical cultural synthesis is being renewed? To me the second answer seems correct. In reality the reciprocally unilateral position contrasting materialism and idealism, criticised in the first thesis on Feuerbach,<sup>42</sup> is being repeated, and now, as then, though at a more advanced moment of history, a synthesis remains necessary at a higher level of development of the philosophy of praxis.

### *Unity in the Constituent Elements of Marxism*

Unity is given by the dialectical development of the contradictions between man and matter (nature—material forces of production). In economics the unitary centre is value, alias the relationship between the worker and the industrial productive forces (those who deny the theory fall into crass vulgar materialism by posing machines in themselves—as constant and technical capital—as producers of value independent of the man who runs them). In philosophy [it

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<sup>41</sup> In his *Ludwig Feuerbach*. See note 1 on p. 381.

<sup>42</sup> Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*: "The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism including that of Feuerbach is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is grasped only under the form of the *object* or of *contemplation*; but not as *human sensuous activity*, as *praxis*, not subjectively. Thus it happened that the *active* side, rather than by materialism, was developed by idealism but only abstractly since naturally idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the objects of thought; but he does not grasp human activity itself as *objective* activity. Therefore, in his *Essence of Christianity*, he regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuine human attitude, while praxis is conceived and fixed only in its dirty-judaical manifestation. He therefore does not grasp the meaning of 'revolutionary', 'practico-critical' activity."

is] praxis, that is, the relationship between human will (super-structure) and economic structure. In politics [it is] the relationship between the State and civil society, that is, the intervention of the State (centralised will) to educate the educator, the social environment in general. (Question to be gone into in depth and stated in more exact terms.)

*Philosophy—Politics—Economics*

If these three activities are the necessary constituent elements of the same conception of the world, there must necessarily be, in their theoretical principles, a convertibility from one to the others and a reciprocal translation into the specific language proper to each constituent element. Any one is implicit in the others, and the three together form a homogeneous circle.\*

From these propositions (still in need of elaboration) there derive for the historian of culture and of ideas a number of research criteria and critical canons of great significance. It can be that a great personality expresses the more fecund aspects of his thought not in the section which, or so it would appear from the point of view of external classification, ought to be the most logical, but elsewhere, in a part which apparently could be judged extraneous. A man of politics writes about philosophy: it could be that his "true" philosophy should be looked for rather in his writings on politics. In every personality there is one dominant and predominant activity: it is here that his thought must be looked for, in a form that is more often than not implicit and at times even in contradiction with what is professedly expressed. Admittedly such a criterion of historical judgment contains many dangers of dilettantism and it is necessary to be very cautious in applying it, but that does not deprive it of its capacity to generate truth.

In reality the occasional "philosopher" can succeed only with difficulty in making abstractions from the currents dominant in his age and from interpretations of a certain conception of the world that have become dogmatic (etc.). As a scientist of politics on the other hand he feels himself free from these idols of his age and of his group and treats the same conception with more immediacy and with total originality; he penetrates to its heart and develops it in a vital way. Here again the thought expressed by [Rosa] Luxemburg remains useful and suggestive when she writes about the impossibility

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\* Compare the notes above on the reciprocal translatability of scientific languages. [MS. pp. 63-67]

of treating certain questions of the philosophy of praxis in so far as they have not yet become *actual* for the course of history in general or that of a given social grouping. To the economico-corporate phase, to the phase of struggle for hegemony in civil society and to the phase of State power there correspond specific intellectual activities which cannot be arbitrarily improvised or anticipated. In the phase of struggle for hegemony it is the science of politics which is developed; in the State phase all the superstructures must be developed, if one is not to risk the dissolution of the State.

### *Historicity of the Philosophy of Praxis*

That the philosophy of praxis thinks of itself in a historicist manner, that is, as a transitory phase of philosophical thought, is not only implicit in its entire system, but is made quite explicit in the well-known thesis that historical development will at a certain point be characterised by the passage from the reign of necessity to the reign of freedom.<sup>43</sup> All hitherto existing philosophies (philosophical systems) have been manifestations of the intimate contradictions by which society is lacerated. But each philosophical system taken by itself has not been the conscious expression of these contradictions, since this expression could be provided only by the *ensemble* of systems in conflict with each other. Every philosopher is, and cannot but be, convinced that he expresses the unity of the human spirit, that is, the unity of history and nature. Indeed, if such a conviction did not exist, men would not act, they would not create new history, philosophies would not become ideologies and would not in practice assume the fanatical granite compactness of the "popular beliefs" which assume the same energy as "material forces".<sup>44</sup>

In the history of philosophical thought Hegel represents a chapter on his own, since in his system, in one way or another, even in the form of a "philosophical romance", one manages to understand what reality is. That is to say, one finds, in a single system and in a single philosopher, that consciousness of contradictions which one previously acquired from the *ensemble* of systems and of philosophers in polemic and contradiction with each other.

In a sense, moreover, the philosophy of praxis is a reform and a development of Hegelianism; it is a philosophy that has been liberated (or is attempting to liberate itself) from any unilateral

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<sup>43</sup> See note 59 on p. 367.

<sup>44</sup> In Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right—Introduction*.

and fanatical ideological elements; it is consciousness full of contradictions, in which the philosopher himself, understood both individually and as an entire social group, not only grasps the contradictions, but posits himself as an element of the contradiction and elevates this element to a principle of knowledge and therefore of action. "Man in general", in whatever form he presents himself, is denied and all dogmatically "unitary" concepts are spurned and destroyed as expressions of the concept of "man in general" or of "human nature" immanent in every man.

But even the philosophy of praxis is an expression of historical contradictions, and indeed their most complete, because most conscious, expression; this means that it too is tied to "necessity" and not to a "freedom" which does not exist and, historically, cannot yet exist. If, therefore, it is demonstrated that contradictions will disappear, it is also demonstrated implicitly that the philosophy of praxis too will disappear, or be superseded. In the reign of "freedom" thought and ideas can no longer be born on the terrain of contradictions and the necessity of struggle. At the present time the philosopher—the philosopher of praxis—can only make this generic affirmation and can go no further; he cannot escape from the present field of contradictions, he cannot affirm, other than generically, a world without contradictions, without immediately creating a utopia.

This is not to say that utopia cannot have a philosophical value, for it has a political value and every politics is implicitly a philosophy, even if disconnected and crudely sketched. In this sense religion is the most gigantic utopia, that is the most gigantic "metaphysics", that history has ever known, since it is the most grandiose attempt to reconcile, in mythological form, the real contradictions of historical life. It affirms, in fact, that mankind has the same "nature", that man in general exists, in so far as created by God, son of God, therefore brother of other men, equal to other men, and free amongst and as other men; and that he can conceive of himself as such, mirrored in God, who is the "self-consciousness" of humanity; but it also affirms that all this is not of this world, but of another (the utopia). Thus do ideas of equality, fraternity and liberty ferment among men, among those strata of mankind who do not see themselves as equals nor as brothers of other men, nor as free in relation to them. Thus it has come about that in every radical stirring of the multitude, in one way or another, with particular forms and particular ideologies, these demands have always been raised.



At this point one can insert an element proposed by Vilich [Lenin]. The April 1917 programme,<sup>45</sup> in the section devoted to the common school,<sup>46</sup> and more exactly in the explanatory note to that section (see the Geneva edition of 1918) refers to the chemist and educationalist Lavoisier,<sup>47</sup> guillotined under the Terror, who had put forward the concept of the common school, and had done so in accord with the popular sentiments of his age, which saw in the democratic movement of 1789 a developing reality and not just an ideology used as an instrument of government and which drew from this concrete egalitarian consequences. In Lavoisier this was still a utopian element (an element which crops up more or less in all cultural currents that presuppose the singleness of human "nature"), whereas for Vilich it had the demonstrative-theoretical significance of a political principle.

If the philosophy of praxis affirms theoretically that every "truth" believed to be eternal and absolute has had practical origins and has represented a "provisional" value (historicity of every conception of the world and of life), it is still very difficult to make people grasp "practically" that such an interpretation is valid also for the philosophy of praxis itself, without in so doing shaking the convictions that are necessary for action. This is, moreover, a difficulty that recurs for every historicist philosophy; it is taken advantage of by cheap polemicists (particularly Catholics) in order to contrast within the same individual the "scientist" and the "demagogue", the philosopher and the man of action, and to deduce that historicism leads necessarily to moral scepticism and depravity. From this difficulty arise many dramas of conscience in little men, and in great men the "Olympian" attitude *à la* Goethe. This is the reason why the proposition about the passage from the reign of necessity to that of freedom must be analysed and elaborated with subtlety and delicacy.

As a result even the philosophy of praxis tends to become an

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<sup>45</sup> See the *Draft of the Revised Party Programme*, prepared by Lenin in April-May 1917, §14: "Free and compulsory general and polytechnical education . . . for all children of both sexes up to the age of sixteen: training of children to be closely integrated with socially productive work." Explanatory notes to the draft were prepared by N. Krupskaya and presumably published, but we have been unable to trace a copy.

<sup>46</sup> *Scuola unitaria*.

<sup>47</sup> Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier (1743-94), French chemist, described by Engels as "the first to place all chemistry, which in its phlogistic form had stood on its head, squarely on its feet". Lavoisier was executed, not for his ideas, but because in order to finance his experiments he had obtained the hated post of *fermier-général* of taxes.

ideology in the worst sense of the word, that is to say a dogmatic system of eternal and absolute truths. This is particularly true when, as happens in the "Popular Manual",<sup>48</sup> it is confused with vulgar materialism, with its metaphysics of "matter" which is necessarily eternal and absolute.

It is also worth saying that the passage from necessity to freedom takes place through the society of men and not through nature (although it may have effects on our intuition of nature, on scientific opinions, etc.). One can go so far as to affirm that, whereas the whole system of the philosophy of praxis may fall away in a unified world, many idealist conceptions, or at least certain aspects of them which are utopian during the reign of necessity, could become "truth" after the passage. One cannot talk of the "spirit" when society is divided into groups without necessarily concluding that this "spirit" is just "*esprit de corps*"! (This fact is implicitly recognised when it is said, as is done by Gentile in his book on modernism,\* following Schopenhauer, that religion is the philosophy of the multitude, whereas philosophy is the religion of the elect, that is of the great intellectuals.) But it will be possible to talk in these terms after the unification has taken place (etc.).

### *Economy and Ideology*

The claim, presented as an essential postulate of historical materialism, that every fluctuation of politics and ideology can be presented and expounded as an immediate expression of the structure, must be contested in theory as primitive infantilism, and combated in practice with the authentic testimony of Marx, the author of concrete political and historical works. Particularly important from this point of view are *The 18th Brumaire* and the writings on the Eastern Question, but also other writings (*Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany*, *The Civil War in France* and lesser works). An analysis of these works allows one to establish better the Marxist historical methodology, integrating, illuminating and interpreting the theoretical affirmations scattered throughout his works.

One will be able to see from this the real precautions introduced by Marx into his concrete researches, precautions which could have

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<sup>48</sup> N. Bukharin, *The Theory of Historical Materialism. A Popular Manual of Marxist Sociology*. See introduction to this section, p. 378.

\* G. Gentile, *Il modernismo e i rapporti tra religione e filosofia*, Bari, Laterza, 1909.

no place in his general works.\* Among these precautions the following examples can be enumerated:

1. The difficulty of identifying at any given time, statically (like an instantaneous photographic image) the structure. Politics in fact is at any given time the reflection of the tendencies of development in the structure, but it is not necessarily the case that these tendencies must be realised. A structural phase can be concretely studied and analysed only after it has gone through its whole process of development, and not during the process itself, except hypothetically and with the explicit proviso that one is dealing with hypotheses.

2. From this it can be deduced that a particular political act may have been an error of calculation on the part of the leaders [*dirigenti*] of the dominant classes, an error which historical development, through the parliamentary and governmental "crises" of the directive [*dirigenti*] classes, then corrects and goes beyond. Mechanical historical materialism does not allow for the possibility of error, but assumes that every political act is determined, immediately, by the structure, and therefore as a real and permanent (in the sense of achieved) modification of the structure. The principle of "error" is a complex one: one may be dealing with an individual impulse based on mistaken calculations or equally it may be a manifestation of the attempts of specific groups or sects to take over hegemony within the directive grouping, attempts which may well be unsuccessful.

3. It is not sufficiently borne in mind that many political acts are due to internal necessities of an organisational character, that is they are tied to the need to give coherence to a party, a group, a society. This is made clear for example in the history of the Catholic Church. If, for every ideological struggle within the Church one wanted to find an immediate primary explanation in the structure one would really be caught napping: all sorts of politico-economic romances have been written for this reason. It is evident on the contrary that the majority of these discussions are connected with sectarian and organisational necessities. In the discussion between

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\* They could have a place only in a systematic and methodical exposition such as that of Bernheim,<sup>49</sup> and Bernheim's book can be held up as a "model" for a scholastic or "popular manual" of historical materialism, in which, apart from the philological and scholarly method (which Bernheim holds to as a matter of principle, although in his treatment there is implicit a conception of the world) the Marxist conception of history should be explicitly treated.

<sup>49</sup> E. Bernheim, *Lehrbuch der historischen Methode*, considered in more detail by Gramsci on p. 415.

Rome and Byzantium on the Procession of the Holy Spirit,<sup>50</sup> it would be ridiculous to look in the structure of the European East for the claim that it proceeds only from the Father, and in that of the West for the claim that it proceeds from the Father and the Son. The two Churches, whose existence and whose conflict is dependent on the structure and on the whole of history, posed questions which are principles of distinction and internal cohesion for each side, but it could have happened that either of the Churches could have argued what in fact was argued by the other. The principle of distinction and conflict would have been upheld all the same, and it is this problem of distinction and conflict that constitutes the historical problem, and not the banner that happened to be hoisted by one side or the other.

*Note II.* The author of ideological serial stories in *Problemi del Lavoro* (who must be none other than the notorious Franz Weiss), during his farcical fairy tale "Russian dumping and its historical significance", speaking about precisely these controversies in early Christian times, asserts that they are tied to the immediate material conditions of the age, and that if we do not succeed in identifying this immediate link it is because the facts are so distant from us or because of some other intellectual weakness. The position is a convenient one, but scientifically insignificant. In fact every real historical phase leaves traces of itself in succeeding phases, which then become in a sense the best document of its existence. The process of historical development is a unity in time through which the present contains the whole of the past and in the present is realised that part of the past which is "essential"—with no residue of any "unknowable" representing the true "essence". The part which is lost, i.e. not transmitted dialectically in the historical process, was in itself of no import, casual and contingent "dross", chronicle and not history, a superficial and negligible episode in the last analysis.

### *Moral Science and Historical Materialism*

The scientific base for a morality of historical materialism is to be looked for, in my opinion, in the affirmation that "society does not

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<sup>50</sup> This debate, which lasted until the fifteenth century, centred around the so-called *filiogue* clause in the Creed, in other words the argument whether the Holy Spirit proceeds "from the Father and from the Son" (*pater filiogue*) as the Western Church maintained, or, as the Byzantines held, only from the Father.

pose for itself tasks the conditions for whose resolution do not already exist".<sup>51</sup> Where these conditions exist "the solution of the tasks *becomes* 'duty', 'will' *becomes* free".<sup>52</sup> Morality would then become a search for the conditions necessary for the freedom of the will in a certain sense, aimed at a certain end, and the demonstration that these conditions exist. It should be a question also not of a hierarchy of ends but of a gradation of the ends to be attained, granted that what one wants to "moralise" is not just each individual taken singly but also a whole society of individuals.

### *Regularity and Necessity*

How did the founder of the philosophy of praxis arrive at the concept of regularity and necessity in historical development? I do not think that it can be thought of as a derivation from natural science but rather as an elaboration of concepts born on the terrain of political economy, particularly in the form and with the methodology that economic science acquired from David Ricardo. Concept and fact of determined market: i.e. the scientific discovery that specific decisive and permanent forces have risen historically and that the operation of these forces presents itself with a certain "automatism" which allows a measure of "predictability" and certainty for the future of those individual initiatives which accept these forces after having discerned and scientifically established their nature. "Determined market" is therefore equivalent to "determined relation of social forces in a determined structure of the productive apparatus", this relationship being guaranteed (that is, rendered permanent) by a determined political, moral and juridical superstructure. After having established the character of these decisive and permanent forces and their spontaneous automatism (i.e. their relative independence from individual choices and from arbitrary government interventions), the scientist has, by way of hypothesis, rendered the automatism absolute; he has isolated the merely economic facts from the combinations of varying importance in which they present themselves in reality; he has established relations of cause and effect, of premisses and conclusions; and he has thus produced an abstract scheme of a determined economic society. (On this realistic and concrete scientific construct there has subsequently been imposed a new, more

<sup>51</sup> Karl Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. See note 60 on p. 367.

<sup>52</sup> This phrase, which is somewhat obscure, is perhaps best taken as a gloss on the above quotation from the Preface to the *Contribution*.

generalised abstraction of "man" as such, "historical" and generic, and it is this abstraction that has come to be seen as "true" economic science.)<sup>53</sup>

Given these conditions in which classical economics was born, in order to be able to talk about a new science or a new conception of economic science (which is the same thing), it would be necessary to have demonstrated that new relations of forces, new conditions, new premisses, have been establishing themselves, in other words that a new market has been "determined" with a new "automatism" and phenomenism of its own, which present themselves as something "objective", comparable to the automatism of natural phenomena. Classical economics has given rise to a "critique of political economy" but it does not seem to me that a new science or a new conception of the scientific problem has yet been possible. The "critique" of political economy<sup>54</sup> starts from the concept of the historical character of the "determined market" and of its "automatism", whereas pure economists conceive of these elements as "eternal" and "natural"; the critique analyses in a realistic way the relations of forces determining the market, it analyses in depth their contradictions, evaluates the possibilities of modification connected with the appearance and strengthening of new elements and puts forward the "transitory" and "replaceable" nature of the science being criticised; it studies it as life but also as death and finds at its heart the elements that will dissolve it and supersede it without fail, and it puts forward the "inheritor", the heir presumptive who must yet give manifest proof of his vitality (etc.).

It is true that in modern economic life the "arbitrary" element, whether at individual, consortium or State level, has acquired an importance it previously did not have and has profoundly disturbed the traditional automatism: but this fact is not sufficient in itself

<sup>53</sup> This abstraction is also referred to by Gramsci as the concept of *homo oeconomicus* or economic man. See note 39 on p. 400.

<sup>54</sup> "Critique of Political Economy" (*Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*) was, as is well known, the title or sub-title given by Marx to all his major economic writings from the *Grundrisse* onwards, and Gramsci also uses the phrase "Critical Economy" as a euphemism for *Capital*. The opposition between "pure" and "critical" economy, however, tends to occur in the *Quaderni* in relation to a later debate, between Marxists and modern bourgeois economists. What is not clear in this passage is whether Gramsci is referring directly to Marx and to *Capital* or to Marxist economics in general. The problem is further aggravated by the fact Gramsci is applying his own set of concepts and criteria (in part suggested to him by Croce), which though interesting in their own right do not respect the historical order of the development of economic thought and are based on a rather summary knowledge of Marx's economic writings and in particular of *Capital* itself.

to justify the conception of new scientific problems, precisely because these interventions are arbitrary, vary in scale, and are unpredictable. It could justify the affirmation that economic life has been modified, that there is a "crisis", but this is obvious. Besides, it is not claimed that the old "automatism" has disappeared; it only asserts itself on a scale larger than before, at the level of major economic phenomena, while individual facts have "gone wild".

It is from these considerations that one must start in order to establish what is meant by "regularity", "law", "automatism" in historical facts. It is not a question of "discovering" a metaphysical law of "determinism", or even of establishing a "general" law of causality. It is a question of bringing out how in historical evolution relatively permanent forces are constituted which operate with a certain regularity and automatism. Even the law of large numbers,<sup>55</sup> although very useful as a model of comparison, cannot be assumed as the "law" of historical events. In order to establish the historical origin of the philosophy of praxis (an element which is nothing less than its particular way of conceiving "immanence"), it will be necessary to study the conception of economic laws put forward by David Ricardo. It is a matter of realising that Ricardo was important in the foundation of the philosophy of praxis not only for the concept of "value" in economics, but was also "philosophically" important and has suggested a way of thinking and intuiting history and life. The method of "supposing that . . .", of the premiss that gives a certain conclusion, should it seems to me, be identified as one of the starting points (one of the intellectual stimuli) of the philosophical experience of the founders of the philosophy of praxis. It is worth finding out if Ricardo has ever been studied from this point of view.\*

It would appear that the concept of "necessity" in history is closely connected to that of "regularity" and "rationality". "Necessity" in the "speculative-abstract" and in the "historical-concrete" sense: necessity exists when there exists an efficient and active

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<sup>55</sup> The law of large numbers is a statistical theorem broadly to the effect that the greater the number of samples the more likely they are to average out to the mean of the "population" from which they are drawn. In economics this means that the random variations of individual cases will tend "on average" to express the underlying law.

\* One should also consider in this light the philosophical concept of "chance" and "law": the concept of a "rationality" or "providence" through which one ends up in transcendental, if not transcendent, teleologism; and that of "chance", as in the metaphysical materialism that "ascribes the world to chance".<sup>56</sup>

<sup>56</sup> The phrase comes from Dante's description (*Inferno* IV, 136) of the Ancient Greek materialist philosopher Democritus "*che il mondo a caso pone*".

*premiss*, consciousness of which in people's minds has become operative, proposing concrete goals to the collective consciousness and constituting a complex of convictions and beliefs which acts powerfully in the form of "popular beliefs". In the *premiss* must be contained, already developed or in the process of development, the necessary and sufficient material conditions for the realisation of the impulse of collective will; but it is also clear that one cannot separate from this "material" premiss, which can be quantified, a certain level of culture, by which we mean a complex of intellectual acts and, as a product and consequence of these, a certain complex of overriding passions and feelings, overriding in the sense that they have the power to lead men on to action "at any price".

As we have said, this is the only way through which one can reach a historicist and not speculative-abstract conception of "rationality" (and therefore irrationality) in history.

Concepts of "providence" and "fortune", in the sense in which they are employed (speculatively) by Italian idealist philosophers and particularly Croce: one should look at Croce's book on Giambattista Vico,<sup>57</sup> in which the concept of "providence" is translated into speculative terms and in which is to be found the beginnings of the idealist interpretation of Vico's philosophy. For the meaning of "fortune" in Machiavelli, one should look at Luigi Russo's writings.<sup>58</sup> According to Russo, "fortune" has a double meaning for Machiavelli, objective and subjective. "Fortune" is the natural force of circumstances (i.e. the causal nexus) the chance concurrence of events, what providence is in the works of Vico; it can also be that transcendent power (i.e. God) mythologised in old mediaeval doctrine, but for Machiavelli this is then nothing other than individual "*virtù*"<sup>59</sup> itself and its power is rooted in

<sup>57</sup> *La filosofia di Giambattista Vico*, first published 1911: Vol. II, 2 of Collected Works.

<sup>58</sup> Gramsci refers in a footnote at this point to a note on p. 23 of Russo's edition of *The Prince* (Florence, 1931). Most of the paragraph which follows is in fact a close paraphrase or quotation from this note of Russo's. Russo's other writings on Machiavelli, including the introduction to his edition (but not the commentary, from which this quotation is taken), have been published in volume form (Florence, 1945).

<sup>59</sup> Literally "virtue", but in connection with Machiavelli better rendered by a word without moral overtones, such as "prowess". In *The Prince* Machiavelli sets up an opposition between *fortuna* (roughly—"circumstance") and *virtù*—the ability of the individual to act on and overcome the given world of circumstance. In Latin *virtus* meant an inherent quality such as (for example and in particular) military valour: Machiavelli tends to make it rather a quality of the will. The moral sense of the English word "virtue" evolved through an intermediary phase in Stoic and Early Christian thought where it meant "inner strength" and hence the ability to act well.



man's will. Machiavelli's "*virtù*", as Russo puts it, is no longer the *virtus* of the scholastics, which has an ethical character and takes its power from heaven, nor that of Livy, which generally means military valour, but it is the *virtù* of Renaissance man, which is capacity, ability, industriousness, individual strength, sensibility, intuition of opportunity and a measure of one's own possibilities.

After this Russo vacillates in his analysis. For him the concept of *fortune*, as force of circumstances, which in Machiavelli as in the Renaissance humanists still retains a *naturalistic and mechanical character*, will become *truth* and deepened historical perception only in the *rational providence* of Vico and Hegel. But it is important to point out that such concepts in Machiavelli never have a meta-physical character, as they do in the philosophers proper of humanism, but are simple and profound intuitions (and therefore philosophy!) of life, and are to be understood and explained as symbols of sentiments.\*

### *A repertory of the Philosophy of Praxis*

An extremely useful thing would be a critical inventory of all the questions that have been raised and discussed in connection with the philosophy of praxis, together with full critical bibliographies. The material for such a specialised, encyclopaedic work is so extensive, so disparate, so varied in quality and in so many languages that only an editorial committee would be able to prepare it within a reasonable length of time. But the usefulness that a compilation of this type would have would be of tremendous importance both in the scientific field, in that of education and among independent scholars. It would become an instrument of prime importance for the dissemination of the study of the philosophy of praxis and for its consolidation into a scientific discipline. It would mark a definite split between two epochs, a modern age and the previous period of elementary fumbings, parrot-like repetitions and journalistic amateurism.

In order to set up the project one would have to study all the material of the same type published by the Catholics, in various countries, in relation to the Bible, the Gospels, the Early Fathers, the Liturgy and Apologetics, great specialised encyclopaedias of

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\* On the gradual metaphysical formation of these concepts, for the pre-Machiavellian period, Russo refers to Gentile, *Giordano Bruno e il pensiero del Rinascimento* (Chapter on "*Il concetto dell'uomo nel Rinascimento*" and appendix), Florence, Vallecchi. For these concepts in Machiavelli, see F. Ercole, *La Politica di Machiavelli* [Rome 1920].

uneven value which are continually being published and which maintain the ideological unity of the hundreds of thousands of priests and other cadres [*dirigenti*] who provide the framework and the strength of the Catholic Church. (For the bibliography of the philosophy of praxis in Germany one should look at the compilations of Ernest Drahn, mentioned by Drahn himself in his introduction to numbers 6068–6069 of the *Reklam Universal Bibliothek*.)

One would have to do for the philosophy of praxis something similar to the work Bernheim did for the historical method.\* Bernheim's book is not a treatise on the philosophy of historicism, but it is implicitly linked to that. A so-called "sociology of the philosophy of praxis" should stand in the same relation to the philosophy itself as Bernheim's book does to historicism in general. In other words it should be a systematic exposition of practical canons of research and interpretation of history—and politics; a collection of immediate criteria, of critical precautions, etc., a philology of history and politics as they are conceived by the philosophy of praxis. It would also, in certain ways, be useful to prepare a critique of a number of tendencies within the philosophy of praxis, tendencies which because of their sheer crudeness would probably prove among the most widespread. This would take the same form as the critique that modern historicism has made of the old historical method and old-fashioned philology, which have led to the growth of naive forms of dogmatism and replaced interpretations and historical construction with external description and the cataloguing of unevaluated sources put together often in a disordered and incoherent way. The strength of these publications consisted for the most part of a kind of dogmatic mysticism which had grown up and become popularised and which expressed itself in the unjustified claim to be followers of the historical method and of science.\*

### *The Founders of the Philosophy of Praxis and Italy*

A systematic collection of all the writings (including letters) [of Marx and Engels] that concern Italy or treat of Italian problems. But a collection that limited itself to a choice of this kind would

\* E. Bernheim. *Lehrbuch der Historischen Methode*, 6th Edition, 1908. Leipzig, Dunker and Humblot. Translated into Italian and published by Sandron, Palermo [Partial translation only].

\* On this question see some of the observations made elsewhere in the series *Riviste Tipo* and those concerning the "Dizionario Critico".<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> See *Int.*, pp. 137–43.

not be organic and properly complete. There are writings of these authors which, although they do not concern themselves specifically with Italy, nonetheless have a significance for Italy (and not just a generic significance, needless to add, for in that case one could claim that all their works were relevant to Italy). The plan of the collection could be designed according to the following criteria:

1. writings with specific reference to Italy;
2. writings on "specific" arguments of historical and political criticism which, although not referring to Italy have a relevance to Italian problems. Examples: the article on the Spanish Constitution of 1812 has a relevance to Italy because of the political function that this constitution had in Italian political movements up to 1848. Similarly the critique in *The Poverty of Philosophy* against the falsification of Hegelian dialectics made by Proudhon is also relevant to Italy in that this falsification finds its reflection in corresponding Italian intellectual movements (Gioberti, the Hegelianism of the Moderates, concept of passive revolution, dialectic revolution/restoration). The same could be said of Engels' writings on the Spanish libertarian movements of 1873 (after the abdication of Amadeus of Savoy), again relevant to Italy, etc. For this second series of writings there is no need perhaps to produce a collection, but just to offer a critico-analytical exposition. Perhaps the most organic plan might be one in three parts:

1. historico-critical introduction;
2. writings on Italy;
3. analysis of writings indirectly relevant to Italy—i.e. those which set out to resolve questions which are essential and specific for Italy as well.

### *Hegemony of Western Culture over the whole World Culture*

1. Even if one admits that other cultures have had an importance and a significance in the process of "hierarchical" unification of world civilisation (and this should certainly be admitted without question), they have had a universal value only in so far as they have become constituent elements of European culture, which is the only historically and concretely universal culture—in so far, that is, as they have contributed to the process of European thought and been assimilated by it.

2. However, even European culture has undergone a process of unification and, in the historical moment that interests us, this has culminated in Hegel and the critique of Hegelianism.

3. It emerges from these two points that we are dealing with the cultural process that is personified in the intellectuals; one should not talk about popular cultures in this connection, since with regard to these one cannot speak of critical elaboration and process of development.

4. Nor is one speaking here of those cultural processes which culminate in real activity, such as that which took place in France in the eighteenth century: or rather one should speak of them only in connection with the process that culminated in Hegel and in classical German philosophy, using them as a "practical" confirmation (in the sense referred to frequently elsewhere)<sup>61</sup> of the reciprocal translatability of the two processes; one, the French, political and juridical, the other, German, theoretical and speculative.

5. From the disintegration of Hegelianism derives the beginning of a new cultural process, different in character from its predecessors, a process in which practical movement and theoretical thought are united (or are trying to unite through a struggle that is both theoretical and practical).

6. It is not important that this movement had its origins in mediocre philosophical works, or at best, in works that were not philosophical masterpieces. What matters is that a new way of conceiving the world and man is born and that this conception is no longer reserved to the great intellectuals, to professional philosophers, but tends rather to become a popular, mass phenomenon, with a concretely world-wide character, capable of modifying (even if the result includes hybrid combinations) popular thought and mummified popular culture.

7. One should not be surprised if this beginning arises from the convergence of various elements, apparently heterogeneous—Feuerbach, in his role as a critic of Hegel, the Tübingen school as an affirmation of the historical and philosophical critique of religion, etc. Indeed it is worth nothing that such an overthrow could not but have connections with religion.

8. The philosophy of praxis as the result and the crowning point of all previous history. Out of the critique of Hegelianism arose modern idealism and the philosophy of praxis. Hegelian immanentism becomes historicism, but it is absolute historicism only with the philosophy of praxis—absolute historicism or absolute humanism. (Ambiguity of atheism and of deism in many modern idealist

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<sup>61</sup> See MS. pp. 63-71, etc. See also p. 400 above.

philosophers: it is clear that atheism is a purely negative and sterile form, unless it is to be conceived as a period of pure popular literary polemic.)

*Passage from Knowing to Understanding and to Feeling and vice versa from Feeling to Understanding and to Knowing*

The popular element "feels" but does not always know or understand; the intellectual element "knows" but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel. The two extremes are therefore pedantry and philistinism on the one hand and blind passion and sectarianism on the other. Not that the pedant cannot be impassioned; far from it. Impassioned pedantry is every bit as ridiculous and dangerous as the wildest sectarianism and demagoguery. The intellectual's error consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned (not only for knowledge in itself but also for the object of knowledge): in other words that the intellectual can be an intellectual (and not a pure pedant) if distinct and separate from the people-nation, that is, without feeling the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and therefore explaining and justifying them in the particular historical situation and connecting them dialectically to the laws of history and to a superior conception of the world, scientifically and coherently elaborated—i.e. knowledge. One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation. In the absence of such a nexus the relations between the intellectual and the people-nation are, or are reduced to, relationships of a purely bureaucratic and formal order; the intellectuals become a caste, or a priesthood (so-called organic centralism).<sup>62</sup>

If the relationship between intellectuals and people-nation, between the leaders and the led, the rulers and the ruled, is provided by an organic cohesion in which feeling-passion becomes understanding and thence knowledge (not mechanically but in a way that is alive), then and only then is the relationship one of representation. Only then can there take place an exchange of individual elements between the rulers and ruled, leaders [*dirigenti*] and led, and can the shared life be realised which alone is a social force—with the creation of the "historical bloc".

De Man "studies" popular feelings: he does not feel with them

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<sup>62</sup> See note 83 on p. 187.

to guide them, and lead them into a catharsis of modern civilisation. His position is that of the scholarly student of folklore who is permanently afraid that modernity is going to destroy the object of his study. What one finds in his book is the pedantic reflection of what is, however, a real need: for popular feelings to be known and studied in the way in which they present themselves objectively and for them not to be considered something negligible and inert within the movement of history.

### CRITICAL NOTES ON AN ATTEMPT AT POPULAR SOCIOLOGY

A work like the *Popular Manual*,<sup>63</sup> which is essentially destined for a community of readers who are not professional intellectuals, should have taken as its starting point a critical analysis of the philosophy of common sense, which is the "philosophy of non-philosophers", or in other words the conception of the world which is uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments in which the moral individuality of the average man is developed. Common sense is not a single unique conception, identical in time and space. It is the "folklore" of philosophy, and, like folklore, it takes countless different forms. Its most fundamental characteristic is that it is a conception which, even in the brain of one individual, is fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is. At those times in history when a homogeneous social group is brought into being, there comes into being also, in opposition to common sense, a homogeneous—in other words coherent and systematic—philosophy.<sup>64</sup>

The first mistake of the *Popular Manual* is that it starts, at least implicitly, from the assumption that the elaboration of an original philosophy of the popular masses is to be opposed to the great systems of traditional philosophy and the religion of the leaders of the clergy—i.e. the conception of the world of the intellectuals and of high culture. In reality these systems are unknown to the

<sup>63</sup> i.e. Bukharin's *Theory of Historical Materialism: A Popular Manual of Marxist Sociology* (see introduction to this section). For reasons of censorship Gramsci refers to Bukharin throughout this section simply as "the author" and to his book as the "Popular Manual" (*Saggio popolare*) or just "the Manual".

<sup>64</sup> For a more systematic exposition of Gramsci's own ideas on common sense, and therefore on the correct starting point for a popular work on Marxism, see the opening pages of "Some Preliminary Points of Reference", p. 323 ff.

multitude and have no direct influence on its way of thinking and acting. This does not mean of course that they are altogether without influence but it is influence of a different kind. These systems influence the popular masses as an external political force, an element of cohesive force exercised by the ruling classes and therefore an element of subordination to an external hegemony. This limits the original thought of the popular masses in a negative direction, without having the positive effect of a vital ferment of interior transformation of what the masses think in an embryonic and chaotic form about the world and life. The principal elements of common sense are provided by religion, and consequently the relationship between common sense and religion is much more intimate than that between common sense and the philosophical systems of the intellectuals. But even within religion some critical distinctions should be made. Every religion, even Catholicism (indeed Catholicism more than any, precisely because of its efforts to retain a "surface" unity and avoid splintering into national churches and social stratifications), is in reality a multiplicity of distinct and often contradictory religions: there is one Catholicism for the peasants, one for the *petits-bourgeois* and town workers, one for women, and one for intellectuals which is itself variegated and disconnected. But common sense is influenced not only by the crudest and least elaborated forms of these sundry Catholicisms as they exist today. Previous religions have also had an influence and remain components of common sense to this day, and the same is true of previous forms of present Catholicism—popular heretical movements, scientific superstitions connected with past cults, etc. In common sense it is the "realistic", materialistic elements which are predominant, the immediate product of crude sensation. This is by no means in contradiction with the religious element, far from it. But here these elements are "superstitious" and acritical. This, then, is a danger of the *Popular Manual*, which often reinforces, instead of scientifically criticising, these acritical elements which have caused common sense to remain Ptolemaic, anthropomorphic and anthropocentric.

The above remarks about the way in which the *Popular Manual* criticises systematic philosophies instead of starting from a critique of common sense, should be understood as a methodological point and within certain limits. Certainly they do not mean that the critique of the systematic philosophies of the intellectuals is to be neglected. When an individual from the masses succeeds in criticising and going beyond common sense, he by this very fact

accepts a new philosophy. Hence the necessity, in an exposition of the philosophy of praxis, of a polemic with traditional philosophies. Indeed, because by its nature it tends towards being a mass philosophy, the philosophy of praxis can only be conceived in a polemical form and in the form of a perpetual struggle. None the less the starting point must always be that common sense which is the spontaneous philosophy of the multitude and which has to be made ideologically coherent.

More than in any other national literature there exist in French philosophical literature treatments of "common sense": this is due to the more strictly "popular-national"<sup>65</sup> character of French culture, in other words to the fact that the intellectuals, because of certain specific traditional conditions, tend more than elsewhere to approach the people in order to guide it ideologically and keep it linked with the leading group. One will be able to find in French literature a lot of material on common sense that can be used and elaborated. The attitude of French philosophical culture towards common sense can indeed offer a model of hegemonic ideological construction. American and English culture can also offer some suggestions, but not in such an organic and complete way as the French. "Common sense" has been treated in various ways. Sometimes it has even been taken as the base of philosophy itself. Alternatively it has been criticised from the point of view of another philosophy. In reality, in either case, the result was to transcend a particular form of common sense and to create another which was closer to the conception of the world of the leading group. In an article on Léon Brunschvicg<sup>66</sup> in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* of the 17 October 1931, Henri Gouhier writes, on the subject of Brunschvicg's philosophy: "There is but one sole movement of spiritualisation, be it in mathematics, physics, biology, philosophy or morals: it is the effort through which the spirit frees itself from common sense and from its spontaneous metaphysics which envisages

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<sup>65</sup> The notion of the "popular-national" (or, more frequently "national-popular") is one of the most interesting and also most widely criticised ideas in Gramsci's thought. Supposedly at the origin of the cultural policy of the PCI since the war, it is perhaps best taken as describing a sort of "historic bloc" between national and popular aspirations in the formation of which the intellectuals, in the wide, Gramscian use of the term play an essential mediating role. It is important to stress, however, that it is a cultural concept, relating to the position of the masses within the culture of the nation, and radically alien to any form of populism or "national socialism".

<sup>66</sup> Léon Brunschvicg (1869-1944): French philosopher, most famous, apart from his work on Pascal, for his application of a neo-Kantian problematic to the philosophy of mathematics and science.



a world of real sensible things and man in the middle of this world".\*

Croce's attitude towards "common sense" seems unclear. In Croce, the proposition that all men are philosophers has an excessive influence on his judgment about common sense. It seems that Croce often likes to feel that certain philosophical propositions are shared by common sense. But what can this mean concretely? Common sense is a chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions, and one can find there anything that one likes. Furthermore, this attitude of Croce's towards common sense has not led to a conception of culture which is productive from the national-popular point of view, that is to a more concretely historicist conception of philosophy—but that in any case could happen only with the philosophy of praxis.

As far as Gentile is concerned one must look at his article *La concezione umanistica del mondo* [The humanistic conception of the world] (in *La Nuova Antologia*, 1 June 1931). Gentile writes: "Philosophy could be defined as a great effort accomplished by reflective thought to gain critical certainty of the truths of common sense and of the naïve consciousness, of those truths of which it can be said that every man feels them naturally and which constitute the solid structure of the mentality he requires for everyday life." This seems yet another example of the disordered crudity of Gentile's thought. Gentile's affirmation seems to be "naively" derived from Croce's affirmations on popular modes of thought as the confirmation of the truth of certain philosophical propositions. Further on Gentile writes: "The healthy man believes in God and in the freedom of his spirit". Thus just in these two propositions of Gentile's we find: 1. an extra-historical "human nature" which one can't see quite what it is; 2. the human nature of the healthy man; 3. the common sense of the healthy man and therefore also a common sense of the non-healthy. But what is meant by healthy man? Physically healthy? Or not mad?<sup>67</sup> Or someone who thinks in a healthy way, right-thinking, philistine, etc.? And what does a "truth of common sense" mean? Gentile's philosophy, for example, is utterly contrary to common sense, whether one understands thereby the naïve philosophy of the people, which revolts against any form of subjectivist idealism, or whether one understands it

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\* Brunschvicg's works—*Les Etapes de la Philosophie Mathématique, L'Expérience Humaine et la Causalité Physique, Le Progrès de la Conscience dans la Philosophie Occidentale, La Connaissance de Soi*.

<sup>67</sup> The sense of this passage is dependent on an ambiguity in the Italian word *sano*, which means both "healthy" in the physical sense and mentally "sane".

to be good sense and a contemptuous attitude to the abstruseness, ingenuities and obscurity of certain forms of scientific and philosophical exposition. This flirtation of Gentile with common sense is quite comical.

What was said above does not mean that there are no truths in common sense. It means rather that common sense is an ambiguous, contradictory and multiform concept, and that to refer to common sense as a confirmation of truth is a nonsense. It is possible to state correctly that a certain truth has become part of common sense in order to indicate that it has spread beyond the confines of intellectual groups, but all one is doing in that case is making a historical observation and an assertion of the rationality of history. In this sense, and used with restraint, the argument has a certain validity, precisely because common sense is crudely neophobe and conservative so that to have succeeded in forcing the introduction of a new truth is a proof that the truth in question has exceptional evidence and capacity for expansion.

Recall Giusti's epigram:

"Good sense, which once ruled far and wide,  
Now in our schools to rest is laid.  
Science, its once beloved child,  
Killed it to see how it was made."<sup>68</sup>

This quotation can serve to indicate how the terms good sense and common sense are used ambiguously: as "philosophy", as a specific mode of thought with a certain content of beliefs and opinions, and as an attitude of amiable indulgence, though at the same time contemptuous, towards anything abstruse and ingenious. It was therefore necessary for science to kill a particular form of traditional good sense, in order to create a "new" good sense.

References to common sense and to the solidity of its beliefs are frequent in Marx.<sup>69</sup> But Marx is referring not to the validity of the content of these beliefs but rather to their formal solidity and

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<sup>68</sup> *"Il buon senso che un di fu caposcuola  
Or nelle nostre scuole è morto affatto.*

*La scienza, sua figliola,  
L'uccise per veder com' era fatto."* (Giusti, *Epigrammi*.)

Giuseppe Giusti (1808-50) was a radical poet and satirist, who combined a fierce hatred of reaction and restoration with an old-fashioned Enlightenment rationalism. This epigram dates from 1849, and in its correct version differs slightly from the text quoted, probably from memory, by Gramsci.

<sup>69</sup> See note 44 on p. 404.

to the consequent imperative character they have when they produce norms of conduct. There is, further, implicit in these references an assertion of the necessity for new popular beliefs, that is to say a new common sense and with it a new culture and a new philosophy which will be rooted in the popular consciousness with the same solidity and imperative quality as traditional beliefs.

*Note I.* One should add on the subject of Gentile's propositions about common sense, that his language is deliberately equivocal for disreputable opportunistic ideological reasons. When he writes, as an example of one of those truths of common sense whose critical certainty is elaborated by reflective thought, that "the healthy man believes in God and in the freedom of his spirit", he wants it to be believed that his philosophy is the conquest of the critical certainty of the truths of Catholicism, but the Catholics do not take the bait and continue to maintain that Gentile's idealism is the purest paganism, etc. None the less Gentile insists and perpetuates an ambiguity which is not without consequence in creating a climate of demi-mondaine culture, in which all cats are grey, religion embraces atheism, immanence flirts with transcendence and Antonio Bruers has a field day, because the more the threads get tangled and thought becomes obscure the more he feels himself justified in his macaronic "syncretism". If Gentile's words meant what they literally say, actual idealism<sup>70</sup> would have become indeed the "manservant of theology".

*Note II.* In the teaching of philosophy which is aimed not at giving the student historical information about the development of past philosophy, but at giving him a cultural formation and helping him to elaborate his own thought critically so as to be able to participate in an ideological and cultural community, it is necessary to take as one's starting point what the student already knows and his philosophical experience (having first demonstrated to him precisely that he has such an experience, that he is a "philosopher" without knowing it). And since one presupposes a certain average cultural and intellectual level among the students, who in all probability have hitherto only

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<sup>70</sup> "Actual idealism": i.e. the philosophy of Gentile, Spirito and others, so called because it saw the spirit as existing concretely in the "act" rather than in self-reflecting consciousness. (See G. Gentile, *Teoria dello spirito come atto puro*, 1916.) For Antonio Bruers, described by Gramsci as "a notorious muddle-headed prattler", see LVN. p. 190.

acquired scattered and fragmentary bits of information and have no methodological and critical preparation, one cannot but start in the first place from common sense, then secondly from religion, and only at a third stage move on to the philosophical systems elaborated by traditional intellectual groups.

#### GENERAL QUESTIONS

##### *Historical Materialism and Sociology*

One preliminary observation to be made is this: that the title does not correspond to the content of the book.<sup>71</sup> "Theory of the philosophy of praxis" ought to mean a logical and coherent systematic treatment of the philosophical concepts generically known under the title of historical materialism (many of which are spurious and come from other sources and as such require to be criticised and eliminated). The first chapters should treat the following questions: What is philosophy? In what sense can a conception of the world be called a philosophy? How has philosophy been conceived hitherto? Does the philosophy of praxis renew this conception? What is meant by a "speculative" philosophy? Would the philosophy of praxis ever be able to have a speculative form? What are the relationships between ideologies, conceptions of the world and philosophies? What is or should be the relationship between theory and practice? How do traditional philosophies conceive of this relationship? etc. The answer to these and other questions constitutes the "theory" of the philosophy of praxis.<sup>72</sup>

In the *Popular Manual* there is not even a coherent justification offered of the premiss implicit in the exposition and explicitly referred to elsewhere, quite casually, that the *true* philosophy is philosophical materialism and that the philosophy of praxis is purely a "sociology". What does this assertion really mean? If it were true, then the theory of the philosophy of praxis would be

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<sup>71</sup> The title is "Theory of Historical Materialism", and the sub-title "A Popular Manual of Marxist Sociology". Gramsci goes on to argue below that only the sub-title is in any way an exact description of the content of Bukharin's work, and even then only "on condition that one gives an extremely restricted meaning to the term 'sociology' ". It should be noted that Gramsci himself vacillates slightly in his notion of what sociology is. His main targets would appear to be empiricism and positivism applied to the science of society, and the reflection of these doctrines, in the guise of "materialism", in Bukharin's *Manual*.

<sup>72</sup> These questions are effectively those to which Gramsci himself attempts to give an answer in his own philosophical writings. See in particular pp. 343-377.

philosophical materialism. But in that case what does it mean to say that the philosophy of praxis is a sociology? What sort of thing would this sociology be? A science of politics and historiography? Or a systematic collection, classified in a particular ordered form, of purely empirical observations on the art of politics and of external canons of historical research? Answers to these questions are not to be found in the book. But only they could be a theory. Thus the connection between the general title "Theory [of historical materialism]" and the sub-title "Popular Manual [of Marxist sociology]" is unjustified. The sub-title would be a more exact title, on condition that one gave an extremely restricted meaning to the term "sociology". In fact the question arises of what is "sociology". Is not sociology an attempt to produce a so-called exact (i.e. positivist) science of social facts, that is of politics and history—in other words a philosophy in embryo? Has not sociology tried to do something similar to the philosophy of praxis?<sup>73</sup> One must however be clear about this: the philosophy of praxis was born in the form of aphorisms and practical criteria for the purely accidental reason that its founder dedicated his intellectual forces to other problems, particularly economic (which he treated in systematic form); but in these practical criteria and these aphorisms is implicit an entire conception of the world, a philosophy.

Sociology has been an attempt to create a method of historical and political science in a form dependent on a pre-elaborated philosophical system, that of evolutionist positivism, against which sociology reacted, but only partially. It therefore became a tendency on its own; it became the philosophy of non-philosophers, an attempt to provide a schematic description and classification of historical and political facts, according to criteria built up on the model of natural science. It is therefore an attempt to derive "experimentally" the laws of evolution of human society in such a way as to "predict" that the oak tree will develop out of the acorn. Vulgar evolutionism is at the root of sociology, and sociology cannot know the dialectical principle with its passage from quantity to quality. But this passage disturbs any form of evolution and any law of uniformity understood in a vulgar evolutionist sense. In any case, any sociology presupposes a philosophy, a conception of the

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<sup>73</sup> What Gramsci has in mind at this point is less the empiricism which is his most usual target than the attempts, notably by Max Weber but also by Pareto and Michels, to construct a general and comprehensive theory of man and society, under the general title (first coined by Auguste Comte) of "sociology".

world, of which it is but a subordinate part. Nor should the particular internal "logic" of the varying forms of sociology, which is what gives them a mechanical coherence, be confused with general theory, that is to say philosophy. Naturally this does not mean that the search for "laws" of uniformity is not a useful and interesting pursuit or that a treatise of immediate observations on the art of politics does not have its purpose. But one should call a spade a spade, and present treatises of this kind for what they really are.

All these are "theoretical" problems, while those that the author of the *Manua* considers as such are not. The questions which he poses are all of an immediate political and ideological order (understanding ideology as an intermediate phase between philosophy and day-to-day practice); they are reflections on disconnected and casual individual historical and political facts. One theoretical question arises for the author right at the beginning, when he refers to a tendency which denies that it is possible to construct a sociology of the philosophy of praxis and which maintains that this philosophy can be expressed only through concrete historical works. This objection, which is extremely important, is not resolved by the author except on the level of phrasemongering. Certainly the philosophy of praxis is realised through the concrete study of past history and through present activity to construct new history. But a theory of history and politics can be made, for even if the facts are always unique and changeable in the flux of movement of history, the concepts can be theorised. Otherwise one would not even be able to tell what movement is, or the dialectic, and one would fall back into a new form of nominalism.\*

The reduction of the philosophy of praxis to a form of sociology has represented the crystallisation of the degenerate tendency, already criticised by Engels (in the letters to two students published in the *Sozial. Akademiker*),<sup>74</sup> and which consists in reducing a con-

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\* It is because he has not posed with any exactitude the question of what "theory" is that the author has been prevented from posing the further question of what is religion and from offering a realistic historical judgment of past philosophies, all of which he presents as pure delirium and folly.

<sup>74</sup> F. Engels. Letters to Josef Bloch and to Heinz Starkenburg, 21 September 1890 and 25 January 1894, published in *Der Sozialistischer Akademiker*, 1 and 15 October 1895. In the letter to Bloch, Engels writes: "According to the materialist conception of history the determining moment in history is *ultimately* the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic moment is the only determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase." Both letters are in fact intended as correctives to the pseudo-Marxist reductionism which Gramsci is also concerned to attack. (See also note 123 below.)

ception of the world to a mechanical formula which gives the impression of holding the whole of history in the palm of its hand. This has provided the strongest incentive to the "pocket-geniuses", with their facile journalistic improvisations. The experience on which the philosophy of praxis is based cannot be schematised; it is history in all its infinite variety and multiplicity, whose study can give rise to "philology"<sup>75</sup> as a method of scholarship for ascertaining particular facts and to philosophy understood as a general methodology of history. This perhaps is what was meant by those writers who, as is mentioned in rather summary fashion in the first chapter of the *Manual*, deny that one can make a sociology of the philosophy of praxis and maintain rather that this philosophy lives only in particular historical essays (this assertion, in such a bald and crude form, is certainly erroneous and seems like a new and curious form of nominalism and philosophical scepticism).

To deny that one can construct a sociology, understood in the sense of a science of society, that is a science of history and politics, which is not co-terminous with the philosophy of praxis itself, does not mean that one cannot build up an empirical compilation of practical observations which extend the sphere of philology as traditionally understood. If philology is the methodological expression of the importance of ascertaining and precisising particular facts in their unique and unrepeatable individuality, one cannot however exclude the practical utility of isolating certain more general "laws of tendency" corresponding in the political field to the laws of statistics or to the law of large numbers which have helped to advance various of the natural sciences.<sup>76</sup> But the fact has not been properly emphasised that statistical laws can be employed in the science and art of politics only so long as the great masses of the population remain (or at least are reputed to remain) essentially passive, in relation to the questions which interest historians and politicians. Furthermore the extension of statistics to the science and art of politics can have very serious consequences to the extent that it is adopted for working out future perspectives and programmes of action. In the natural sciences the worst that statistics

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<sup>75</sup> "Philology": Gramsci uses the word here partly in its conventional sense of the study of linguistic and historical documents (i.e. the primary sources of historiography and literary history) but partly in the sense resuscitated by Croce from the writings of Vico, which divides knowledge into philosophy as the science of the True and philology as the pursuit of the Certain. (See also note 11 on p. 35.)

<sup>76</sup> For the law of large numbers and for Gramsci's use of the notion of a law of tendency see notes 55 and 40 on pp. 412 and 401.

can do is produce blunders and irrelevances which can easily be corrected by further research and which in any case simply make the individual scientist who used the technique look a bit ridiculous. But in the science and art of politics it can have literally catastrophic results which do irreparable harm. Indeed in politics the assumption of the law of statistics as an essential law operating of necessity is not only a scientific error, but becomes a practical error in action. What is more it favours mental laziness and a superficiality in political programmes. It should be observed that political action tends precisely to rouse the masses from passivity, in other words to destroy the law of large numbers. So how can that law be considered a law of sociology? If one thinks about it even the demand for a planned, i.e. guided, economy is destined to break down the statistical law understood in a mechanical sense, that is statistics produced by the fortuitous putting together of an infinity of arbitrary individual acts. Planning of this kind must be based on statistics, but that is not the same thing. Human awareness replaces naturalistic "spontaneity". A further element which, in the art of politics, leads to the overthrow of the old naturalistic schema is the replacement by political organisms (parties) of single individuals and individual (or charismatic,<sup>77</sup> as Michels calls them) leaders. With the extension of mass parties and their organic coalescence with the intimate (economic-productive) life of the masses themselves, the process whereby popular feeling is standardised ceases to be mechanical and casual (that is produced by the conditioning of environmental factors and the like) and becomes conscious and critical. Knowledge and a judgment of the importance of this feeling on the part of the leaders is no longer the product of hunches backed up by the identification of statistical laws, which leaders then translate into ideas and words-as-force. (This is the rational and intellectual way and is all too often fallacious.) Rather it is acquired by the collective organism through "active and conscious co-participation", through "compassionality", through experience of immediate particulars, through a system which one could call "living philology". In this way a close link is formed between great mass, party and leading group; and the whole complex, thus articulated, can move together as "collective-man".

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<sup>77</sup> The notion of "charisma" as a quality which causes leaders to be followed in spite of their lack of legitimate or institutional authority derives in fact not from Michels but from Max Weber, who in turn took it from the jurist and church historian Rudolf Sohm. For Michels see note 79 below.



Henri De Man's book,<sup>78</sup> if it has any value, has it precisely in this sense, in that he invites us to "inform" ourselves in more detail about the real feelings of groups and individuals and not those that are assumed on the basis of sociological laws. But De Man has made no original discoveries, nor has he found any original principle which goes beyond the philosophy of praxis or scientifically proves it to be sterile or mistaken. He has elevated to the status of a scientific principle an empirical criterion of the art of politics which was already well known and had been applied, although it had perhaps been insufficiently defined and developed. But De Man has not even been able to establish the exact limits of his criterion, for he has finished up by just producing a new statistical law and, unconsciously and under another name, a new method of social mathematics and of external classification, a new abstract sociology.

*Note I.* The so-called laws of sociology which are assumed as laws of causation (such-and-such a fact occurs because of such-and-such a law, etc.) have no causal value: they are almost always tautologies and paralogisms. Usually they are no more than a duplicate of the observed fact itself. A fact or a series of facts is described according to a mechanical process of abstract generalisation, a relationship of similarity is derived from this and given the title of law and the law is then assumed to have causal value. But what novelty is there in that? The only novelty is the collective name given to a series of petty facts, but names are not an innovation. (In Michels' treatises<sup>79</sup> one can find a whole catalogue of similar tautological generalisations, the last and most famous being that about the "charismatic leader".) What is not realised is that in this way one falls into a baroque form of Platonic idealism, since these abstract laws have a strange resemblance to Plato's pure ideas which are the essence of real earthly facts.

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<sup>78</sup> *Au delà du Marxisme*. See note 74 on p. 376.

<sup>79</sup> See in particular "Political Parties" (*Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens*, 1911. English translation, from the Italian, 1915). Robert Michels (1876-1936) was a German sociologist of (originally) Social-Democratic leanings who emigrated first to Switzerland and then to Italy, where he became a naturalised citizen under the Mussolini régime. Michels is most famous for his "iron law of oligarchy" and together with Mosca and Pareto is an originator of the theory of political élites. Despite Gramsci's evident contempt for Michels' method and distaste for his politics, it has been argued that there was a certain indirect influence of Michels and élite theory on his own theory of social and political structures in non-revolutionary periods. (See G. Galli, "Gramsci e le teorie delle élites", in *Gramsci e la cultura contemporanea*, vol. II, pp. 201-217.)

*The Constituent Parts of the Philosophy of Praxis*

A systematic treatment of the philosophy of praxis cannot afford to neglect any of the constituent parts of the doctrines of its founder [Marx]. But how should this be understood? It should deal with all the general philosophical part, and then should develop in a coherent fashion all the general concepts of a methodology of history and politics and, in addition, of art, economics and ethics, finding place in the overall construction for a theory of the natural sciences. One widespread conception is that the philosophy of praxis is a pure philosophy, the science of dialectics, the other parts of it being economics and politics, and it is therefore maintained that the doctrine is formed of three constituent parts, which are at the same time the consummation and the transcending of the highest level reached around 1848 by science in the most advanced countries of Europe: classical German philosophy, English classical economics and French political activity and science. This conception, which reflects rather a generic search for historical sources than a classification drawn from the heart of the doctrine itself, cannot be set up in opposition, as a definitive scheme, to some other definition of the doctrine which is closer to reality. It will be asked whether the philosophy of praxis is not precisely and specifically a theory of history, and the answer must be that this is indeed true but that one cannot separate politics and economics from history, even the specialised aspects of political science and art and of economic science and policy. This means that, after having accomplished the principal task in the general philosophical part, which deals with the philosophy of praxis proper—the science of dialectics or the theory of knowledge, within which the general concepts of history, politics and economics are interwoven in an organic unity—it would be useful, in a popular manual, to give a general outline of each moment or constituent part, even to the extent of treating them as independent and distinct sciences. On close examination it is clear that in the *Popular Manual* all these points are at least referred to, but casually and incoherently, in a quite chaotic and indistinct way, because there is no clear and precise concept of what the philosophy of praxis itself actually is.

*Structure and Historical Movement*

This fundamental point is not dealt with: how does the historical movement arise on the structural base? The problem is however

referred to in Plekhanov's *Fundamentals*<sup>80</sup> and could be developed. This is furthermore the crux of all the questions that have arisen around the philosophy of praxis and without resolving this one cannot resolve the corresponding problem about the relationship between society and "nature", to which the *Manual* devotes a special chapter. It would have been necessary to analyse the full import and consequences of the two propositions in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* to the following effect:

1. Mankind only poses for itself such tasks as it can resolve; . . . the task itself only arises when the material conditions for its resolution already exist or at least are in the process of formation.
2. A social order does not perish until all the productive forces for which it still has room have been developed and new and higher relations of production have taken their place, and until the material conditions of the new relations have grown up within the womb of the old society. Only on this basis can all mechanism and every trace of the superstitiously "miraculous" be eliminated, and it is on this basis that the problem of the formation of active political groups, and, in the last analysis, even the problem of the historical function of great personalities must be posed.

### *The Intellectuals*

It would be worth compiling a "reasoned" catalogue of the men of learning whose opinions are widely quoted or contested in the book, each name to be accompanied by notes on their significance and scientific importance (this to be done also for the supporters of the philosophy of praxis who are certainly not quoted in the light of their originality and significance). In fact there are only the most passing references to the great intellectuals. The question is raised: would it not have been better to have referred only to the major intellectuals on the enemy side, leaving aside the men in the second rank, the regurgitators of second-hand phrases? One gets the impression that the author wants to combat only the weakest of his adversaries and the weakest of their positions (or the ones which the weakest adversaries have maintained least adequately), in order to obtain facile verbal victories—for one can hardly speak of real victories. The illusion is created that there exists some kind of more than formal and metaphorical resemblance between an ideological and a politico-military front. In the political and military

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<sup>80</sup> G. Plekhanov, *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, 1908.

struggle it can be correct tactics to break through at the points of least resistance in order to be able to assault the strongest point with maximum forces that have been precisely made available by the elimination of the weaker auxiliaries. Political and military victories, within certain limits, have a permanent and universal value and the strategic end can be attained decisively with a general effect for everyone. On the ideological front, however, the defeat of the auxiliaries and the minor hangers-on is of all but negligible importance. Here it is necessary to engage battle with the most eminent of one's adversaries. Otherwise one confuses newspapers with books, and petty daily polemic with scientific work. The lesser figures must be abandoned to the infinite casebook of newspaper polemic.

A new science proves its efficacy and vitality when it demonstrates that it is capable of confronting the great champions of the tendencies opposed to it and when it either resolves by its own means the vital questions which they have posed or demonstrates, in peremptory fashion, that these questions are false problems.

It is true that an historical epoch and a given society are characterised rather by the average run of intellectuals, and therefore by the more mediocre. But widespread, mass ideology must be distinguished from the scientific works and the great philosophical syntheses which are its real cornerstones. It is the latter which must be overcome, either negatively, by demonstrating that they are without foundation, or positively, by opposing to them philosophical syntheses of greater importance and significance. Reading the *Manual* one has the impression of someone who cannot sleep for the moonlight and who struggles to massacre the fireflies in the belief that by so doing he will make the brightness lessen or disappear.

### *Science and System*

Is it possible to write an elementary book, a handbook, a "Popular Manual", on a doctrine that is still at the stage of discussion, polemic and elaboration? A popular manual cannot be conceived other than as a formally dogmatic, stylistically poised and scientifically balanced exposition of a particular subject. It can only be an introduction to scientific study, and not an exposition of original scientific researches, since it is written for young people or for a public which, from the point of view of scientific discipline, is in a condition like that of youth and therefore has an immediate need

for “certainties”, for opinions which, at least on a formal level, appear as reliably true and indisputable. If the doctrine in question has not yet reached this “classical” phase of its development, any attempt to “manualise” it is bound to fail, its logical ordering will be purely apparent and illusory, and one will get, as with the “Popular Manual”, just a mechanical juxtaposition of disparate elements which remain inexorably disconnected and disjointed in spite of the unitary varnish provided by the literary presentation. Why not therefore pose the question in its correct theoretical and historical terms and rest content with a book in which each of the essential problems of the doctrine receives separate monographic treatment? This would be more serious and more “scientific”. But the vulgar contention is that science must absolutely mean “system”, and consequently systems of all sorts are built up which have only the mechanical exteriority of a system and not its necessary inherent coherence.

### *The Dialectic*

The *Manual* contains no treatment of any kind of the dialectic. The dialectic is presupposed, in a very superficial manner, but is not expounded, and this is absurd in a manual which ought to contain the essential elements of the doctrine under discussion and whose bibliographical references should be aimed at stimulating study in order to widen and deepen understanding of the subject and not at replacing the manual itself. The absence of any treatment of the dialectic could have two origins. The first of these would be the fact that philosophy of praxis is envisaged as split into two elements: on the one hand a theory of history and politics conceived as sociology—i.e. one that can be constructed according to the methods of natural science (experimental in the crudest positivist sense); and on the other hand a philosophy proper, this being philosophical alias metaphysical or mechanical (vulgar) materialism.

Even after the great debate which has taken place against mechanicism, the author of the *Manual* does not appear to have changed very much his way of posing the philosophical problem. It would appear from the contribution presented at the London Congress on the History of Science<sup>81</sup> that he continues to maintain that the philosophy of praxis has always been split into two: a

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<sup>81</sup> See Introduction to this Section.

doctrine of history and politics, and a philosophy, although he now calls the latter dialectical materialism. But if the question is framed in this way, one can no longer understand the importance and significance of the dialectic, which is relegated from its position as a doctrine of knowledge and the very marrow of historiography and the science of politics, to the level of a sub-species of formal logic and elementary scholastics. The true fundamental function and significance of the dialectic can only be grasped if the philosophy of praxis is conceived as an integral and original philosophy which opens up a new phase of history and a new phase in the development of world thought. It does this to the extent that it goes beyond both traditional idealism and traditional materialism, philosophies which are expressions of past societies, while retaining their vital elements. If the philosophy of praxis is not considered except in subordination to another philosophy, then it is not possible to grasp the new dialectic, through which the transcending of old philosophies is effected and expressed.

The second origin would appear to be psychological. It is felt that the dialectic is something arduous and difficult, in so far as thinking dialectically goes against vulgar common sense, which is dogmatic and eager for peremptory certainties and has as its expression formal logic. To understand this better one can think of what would happen if in primary and secondary schools natural and physical sciences were taught on the basis of Einsteinian relativity and the traditional notion of a "law of nature" was accompanied by that of a statistical law or of the law of large numbers. The children would not understand anything at all and the clash between school teaching and family and popular life would be such that the school would become an object of ridicule and caricature.

This motivation seems to me to act as a psychological brake on the author of the *Manual*; he really does capitulate before common sense and vulgar thought, since he has not put the problem in exact theoretical terms and is therefore in practice disarmed and impotent. The uneducated and crude environment has dominated the educator and vulgar common sense has imposed itself on science rather than the other way round. If the environment is the educator, it too must in turn be educated,<sup>82</sup> but the *Manual* does not understand this revolutionary dialectic. The source of all the errors of the *Manual*, and of its author (who does not seem to have changed

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. the third of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*.

his position, even after the great debate which apparently, or so it would appear from the text presented at the London Congress, resulted in his repudiating the book), consists precisely in this pretension to divide the philosophy of praxis into two parts: a "sociology" and a systematic philosophy. Separated from the theory of history and politics philosophy cannot be other than metaphysics, whereas the great conquest in the history of modern thought, represented by the philosophy of praxis, is precisely the concrete historicisation of philosophy and its identification with history.

### *On Metaphysics*

Can one extract from the Popular Manual a critique of metaphysics and of speculative philosophy? It has to be said that the author fails to grasp the very concept of metaphysics, just as he fails to grasp the concepts of historical movement, of becoming and, therefore, of the dialectic itself. To think of a philosophical affirmation as true in a particular historical period (that is, as the necessary and inseparable expression of a particular historical action, of a particular praxis) but as superseded and rendered "vain" in a succeeding period, without however falling into scepticism and moral and ideological relativism, in other words to see philosophy as historicity, is quite an arduous and difficult mental operation. The author, however, falls headlong into dogmatism and therefore into a form, though a naïve one, of metaphysics. This is clear from the beginning in the way in which the problem is situated and from the desire to construct a systematic "sociology" of the philosophy of praxis—sociology, in this case, meaning precisely naïve metaphysics. In the final section of the introduction the author is incapable of replying to those critics who maintain that the philosophy of praxis can live only in concrete works of history. He does not succeed in elaborating the concept of philosophy of praxis as "historical methodology", and of that in turn as "philosophy", as the only concrete philosophy. That is to say he does not succeed in posing and resolving, from the point of view of the real dialectic, the problem which Croce has posed and has attempted to resolve from the speculative point of view. Instead of a historical methodology, of a philosophy, he constructs a casebook of particular questions which he envisages and resolves in a dogmatic fashion, and sometimes purely verbally, with paralogsms that are as pretentious as they are naïve. This casebook could be useful and interesting if

it was presented as such, with no pretension beyond that of giving approximate schemas of an empirical character, useful for immediate practice. But one can see why this is bound to happen since in the *Popular Manual* the philosophy of praxis is not an autonomous and original philosophy but the "sociology" of metaphysical materialism. As far as the book is concerned, metaphysics means only a specific philosophical formulation, that of speculative idealism, rather than any systematic formulation that is put forward as an extra-historical truth, as an abstract universal outside of time and space.

The philosophy implicit in the *Popular Manual* could be called a positivistic Aristotelianism, an adaptation of formal logic to the methods of physical and natural science. The historical dialectic is replaced by the law of causality and the search for regularity, normality and uniformity. But how can one derive from this way of seeing things the overcoming, the "overthrow" of praxis?<sup>83</sup> In mechanical terms, the effect can never transcend the cause or the system of causes, and therefore can have no development other than the flat vulgar development of evolutionism.

If "speculative idealism" is the science of categories and of the *a priori* synthesis of the spirit, i.e. a form of anti-historicist abstraction, the philosophy implicit in the *Popular Manual* is idealism upside down, in the sense that the speculative categories are replaced by empirical concepts and classifications which are no less abstract and anti-historical.

One of the most blatant traces of old-fashioned metaphysics in the *Popular Manual* is the attempt to reduce everything to a single ultimate or final cause. One could reconstruct the history of the problem of the single ultimate cause and demonstrate that it is one manifestation of the "search for God". In opposition to this dogmatism recall once again the two letters of Engels published in the *Sozial. Akademiker*.<sup>84</sup>

### *The Concept of "Science"*

The situating of the problem as a search for laws and for constant, regular and uniform lines is connected to a need, conceived in a somewhat puerile and ingenuous way, to resolve in peremptory fashion the practical problem of the predictability of historical events. Since it "appears", by a strange inversion of the perspectives,

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<sup>83</sup> il "rovesciamento" della prassi. See note 56 on p. 366.

<sup>84</sup> See note 74 on p. 427.



that the natural sciences provide us with the ability to foresee the evolution of natural processes, historical methodology is "scientifically" conceived only if, and in so far as, it permits one "abstractly" to foresee the future of society. Hence the search for essential causes, indeed for the "first cause", for the "cause of causes". But the *Theses on Feuerbach* had already criticised in advance this simplistic conception. In reality one can "scientifically" foresee only the struggle, but not the concrete moments of the struggle, which cannot but be the results of opposing forces in continuous movement, which are never reducible to fixed quantities since within them quantity is continually becoming quality. In reality one can "foresee" to the extent that one acts, to the extent that one applies a voluntary effort and therefore contributes concretely to creating the result "foreseen". Prediction reveals itself thus not as a scientific act of knowledge, but as the abstract expression of the effort made, the practical way of creating a collective will.

And how could prediction be an act of knowledge? One knows what has been and what is, not what will be, which is something "non-existent" and therefore unknowable by definition. Prediction is therefore only a practical act which cannot, at the risk of being an utterly futile waste of time, have any other explanation than that given above. It is necessary to pose in exact terms the problem of the predictability of historical events in order to be able to criticise exhaustively the conception of mechanical causalism, to rid it of any scientific prestige and reduce it to a pure myth which perhaps was useful in the past in a backward period of development of certain subaltern social groups.

But it is the concept itself of "science", as it merges from the *Popular Manual*, which requires to be critically destroyed. It is taken root and branch from the natural sciences, as if these were the only sciences or science *par excellence*, as decreed by positivism. But in the *Popular Manual* the term science is used in several meanings, some explicit, some only by implication or barely mentioned. The explicit sense is the one that "science" has in physical research. At other times however it seems to indicate the method. But does there exist a method in general, and if it does exist surely then it can only mean philosophy? At other times it could mean nothing more than formal logic: but can one call that a method and a science? It has to be established that every research has its own specific method and constructs its own specific science, and that the method has developed and been elaborated together with the development and elaboration of this specific research and science and forms with them

a single whole. To think that one can advance the progress of a work of scientific research by applying to it a standard method, chosen because it has given good results in another field of research to which it was naturally suited, is a strange delusion which has little to do with science. There do however exist certain general criteria which could be held to constitute the critical consciousness of every man of science whatever his "specialisation", criteria which should always be spontaneously vigilant in his work. Thus one can say someone is not a scientist if he displays a lack of sureness in his particular criteria, if he does not have a full understanding of the concepts he is using, if he has scant information on and understanding of the previous state of the problems he is dealing with, if he is not very cautious in his assertions, if he does not proceed in a necessary but in an arbitrary and disconnected fashion, if he cannot take account of the gaps that exist in knowledge acquired but covers them over and contents himself with purely verbal solutions and connections instead of stating that one is dealing with provisional positions which may have to be gone over again and developed, etc.

One observation which could be made on many polemical references in the *Manual* is its systematic failure to recognise the possibility of error on the part of individual authors quoted, with the result that a social group—of which the men of science are always assumed to be the representatives—finds attributed to it the most disparate opinions and the most contradictory intentions. This is connected precisely to a more general criterion of method which is this: it is not very "scientific", or more simply it is not very "serious", to choose to combat the stupidest and most mediocre of one's opponents or even to choose the least essential and the most occasional of their opinions and then to presume thereby to have "destroyed" "all" the enemy because one has destroyed a secondary and incidental opinion of his or to have destroyed an ideology or a doctrine because one has demonstrated the theoretical inadequacy of its third- or fourth-rate champions. Further: "one must be fair to one's enemies", in the sense that one must make an effort to understand what they really meant to say and not maliciously stop short at the superficial immediate meaning of their expressions. That is to say, if the end proposed is that of raising the tone and intellectual level of one's followers and not just the immediate aim of creating a desert around oneself by all means possible. The point of view to be adopted is this: one's supporter must discuss and uphold his own point of view in debate with capable and intelligent

opponents and not just with clumsy untrained people who are convinced "by authority" or "by emotion". The possibility of error must be asserted and justified, but without being untrue to one's own conception, because what counts is not the opinion of Tom, Dick and Harry, but that ensemble of opinions which have become collective, a social element and a social force. These are the opinions that must be refuted, in the person of those of their theoretical exponents who are most representative and indeed worthy of respect for the high quality of their thought and for their "disinterestedness" in the immediate term. Nor should this be done with the idea that one has thereby destroyed the corresponding social element and social force (which would be pure enlightenment rationalism) but only with the idea of having contributed 1. to maintaining and strengthening among one's own side the spirit of distinction and division; and 2. to preparing the ground for one's own side to absorb and give life to an original doctrine of its own, corresponding to its own conditions of life.

It is worth observing that many of the deficiencies of the *Popular Manual* are connected with its "oratory". The author refers in the preface, as if with pride, to the "spoken" origin of his work. But as Macaulay observed long ago in connection with oral discussions in Greece, it is precisely "oral demonstrations" and the mentality of orators which tend to be connected with the most incredible superficialities of logic and argumentation. In any case this does not lessen the responsibility of authors who do not revise before printing the text of lectures delivered orally often with improvisation in which a mechanical and casual association of ideas often replaces the sinew of the argument. The worst thing is when, as a result of this oratorical practice, the facile attitude of mind is consolidated and critical restraints cease to function. One could make a list of the "ignorantiae", "mutationes", "elenchi"<sup>85</sup> of the *Popular Manual*, due in all probability to its oratorical "ardour". A typical example, in my opinion, would be the section devoted to Professor Stammer, which is quite exceptionally superficial and sophistic.

### *The So-Called "Reality of the External World"*

The entire polemic against the subjectivist conception of reality, with the "fearsome" question of the "objective reality of the external world", is badly framed and conducted worse and is to a great degree

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<sup>85</sup> Types of error of reasoning as categorised in scholastic logic.

futile and superfluous. (I refer here also to the paper presented at the Congress of History of Science, held in London in June-July 1931.) From the point of view of a popular manual the whole treatment is more a response to an intellectual pedantic itch than to any logical necessity. The popular public does not think that a problem such as whether the external world exists objectively can even be asked. One just has to enunciate the problem in these terms to provoke an irresistible and gargantuan outburst of laughter. The public "believes" that the external world is objectively real, but it is precisely here that the question arises: what is the origin of this "belief" and what critical value does it "objectively" have? In fact the belief is of religious origin, even if the man who shares it is indifferent to religion. Since all religions have taught and do teach that the world, nature, the universe were created by God before the creation of man, and therefore man found the world all ready made, catalogued and defined once and for all, this belief has become an iron fact of "common sense" and survives with the same solidity even if religious feeling is dead or asleep. It follows therefore that to base oneself on this experience of common sense in order to destroy the subjectivist conception by "poking fun" at it has a rather "reactionary" significance, an implicit return to religious feeling. Indeed Catholic writers and orators have recourse to the same means in order to obtain the same effect of corrosive ridicule.\*

In the paper presented at the London Congress the author of the *Popular Manual* replies implicitly to this observation (which, though it has its importance, is of an external character), noting that Berkeley, to whom we owe the first worked out enunciation of the subjectivist conception, was an archbishop<sup>86</sup> (from which, it seems, one could deduce the religious origin of the theory) and then saying that only "Adam", finding himself on the world for the first time, could think that the world exists only because he thinks (and here again the religious origin of the theory is insinuated, though without much, or any, force of conviction).

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\* The Church (through the Jesuits and in particular the neo-scholastics: Universities of Louvain and of the Sacred Heart in Milan) has attempted to absorb positivism and indeed takes advantage of this reasoning to ridicule the idealists in the eyes of the crowd: "The idealists are the people who think that this or that tower only exists because you think it; if you didn't think it the tower would no longer exist."

<sup>86</sup> George Berkeley subsequently became Bishop of Cloyne, in Ireland, but he was only a minor cleric at the time when, in his youth, he published his subjectivist philosophy.

The problem on the other hand, it seems to me, is this: how can one explain how such a conception, which is certainly not pure futility, even for a philosophy of praxis, should today, when exposed to the public, provoke only laughter and mockery? This seems to me the most typical cause of the distance that has grown up between science and life, between certain groups of intellectuals—who are however in “central” positions of command in high culture—on the one hand, and the great popular masses on the other; and a cause also of the way in which the language of philosophy has become a jargon which produces the same effect as that of Harlequin. But if common sense finds it funny, the philosopher of praxis should all the same look for an explanation both of the real meaning which the conception has and of the reason why it was born and became diffused among the intellectuals, and also of the reason why it is found laughable by common sense. Without doubt the subjectivist conception is proper to modern philosophy in its most achieved and advanced form, in that it gave birth to, and was superseded by, historical materialism, a philosophy which, in its theory of superstructures, poses in realistic and historicist terms what traditional philosophy expressed in a speculative form. A demonstration of this point, which is hardly referred to in the book, would have the greatest cultural significance because it would put an end to a whole series of futile and irrelevant discussions and permit an organic development of the philosophy of praxis even to the point of it becoming the hegemonic exponent of high culture. It is surprising that there has been no proper affirmation and development of the connection between the idealist assertion of the reality of the world as a creation of the human spirit and the affirmation made by the philosophy of praxis of the historicity and transience of ideologies on the grounds that ideologies are expressions of the structure and are modified by modifications of the structure.

The question is closely connected, for obvious reasons, with the question of the value of the so-called exact or physical sciences and the position they have come to acquire within the philosophy of praxis, a position of near-fetishism, in which indeed they are regarded as the only true philosophy or knowledge of the world.

But what are we to understand by the subjectivist conception of reality? Can we take up any one of the countless subjectivist theories thought up by a whole series of philosophers and professors stretching right through into solipsism? It is clear that here again the philosophy of praxis can be compared only with Hegelianism,

which represents the most brilliant and achieved form of this conception, and that from subsequent theories one need take into consideration only certain partial aspects and instrumental values. It is also worth looking into the more bizarre forms taken by the conception, whether amongst its adherents or amongst its critics of greater or lesser intelligence. Thus it is worth recalling what Tolstoy writes in his *Memoirs of Childhood, Boyhood and Youth*. He writes there that he became so enthused with the subjectivist conception of reality that he often used to make himself dizzy with suddenly turning faceabout, convinced that he could thus capture the moment in which he would see nothing because his spirit would not have had time to "create" reality (or something of the kind: the passage of Tolstoy is characteristic and of great literary interest).\*

Thus too in his *Linee di filosofia critica*<sup>87</sup> (p. 159) Bernardino Varisco writes: "I open the newspaper for information on the news; how can you maintain that I myself created the news by opening the paper?" That Tolstoy should have given such an immediate and mechanical significance to the subjectivist proposition is understandable. But is it not incredible that Varisco should write in this way, for, although nowadays he is oriented towards religion and transcendental dualism, he is nevertheless a serious scholar and should know his own subject? Varisco's is a common-sense critique, and it is worth noting that such a critique is disregarded by the idealist philosophers despite its extreme importance in hindering the diffusion of a mode of thought and of a culture. One can recall an article by Mario Missiroli in *L'Italia Letteraria*, where he writes

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\* L. Tolstoy. *Childhood, Boyhood and Youth*. Ch. XIX of the "Boyhood" section. "But by none of my philosophical tendencies was I so carried away as by scepticism, which at one time led me to the verge of insanity. I imagined that besides myself nobody existed in the universe, that objects were not objects at all, but images which appeared only when I paid attention to them, and that as soon as I left off thinking of them these images immediately disappeared. In a word, I coincided with Schelling in the conviction that not objects exist but my relation to them. There were moments when, under the influence of this *idée fixe*, I reached such a state of insanity that I sometimes looked rapidly round to one side, hoping to catch emptiness (*le néant*) unawares where I was not."

Apart from the Tolstoy example, recall the facetious way in which a journalist described the "professional or traditional" philosopher (represented by Croce in the chapter "The Philosopher") who had sat for years at his desk staring at the ink-well and asking himself "Is this ink-well inside me or outside?"

<sup>87</sup> B. Varisco, *Linee di filosofia critica*, 1925. Bernardino Varisco (1850-1933) was trained as a scientist and became a noted positivist philosopher, but gradually moved towards idealism and then to a form of religious philosophy which saw in God the "absolute subject" validating the reality of the world.

that he would feel very embarrassed if he found himself obliged, in front of an ordinary public and in debate with a neo-scholastic, to defend, for example, the subjectivist point of view. He also observes how Catholicism tends, in its competition with idealist philosophy, to appropriate to its side natural and physical science. Elsewhere Missiroli has written that he foresees a period of decline of speculative philosophy and an ever-increasing diffusion of the experimental and "realistic" sciences. (In this other text, however, published by *Il Saggiatore*, he also foresees a wave of anti-clericalism. In other words he apparently no longer believes in the appropriation of science by Catholicism.) Also worth recalling is the "pumpkin polemic"<sup>88</sup> to be found in the volume of writings of Roberto Ardigò (*Scritti vari*, collected and arranged by G. Marchesini, Lemonnier, 1922). In a minor provincial clerical paper, some writer (a priest of the Episcopal Curia), in order to disqualify Ardigò in the eyes of a popular public, called him more or less "one of those philosophers who maintain that the cathedral (of Mantua or wherever it may be) only exists because they think it, and when they cease to think it the cathedral disappears" (etc.), a charge which was sharply resented by Ardigò who was a positivist and agreed with the Catholics as to the way of conceiving external reality.

It must be demonstrated that while the "subjectivist" conception has had its usefulness as a criticism of the philosophy of transcendence on the one hand and the naïve metaphysics of common sense and of philosophical materialism on the other, it can find its truth and its historicist interpretation only in the concept of superstructures. As for its speculative form, it is no more than a mere philosophical romance.\*

The point that must be made against the *Popular Manual* is that it has presented the subjectivist conception just as it appears from the point of view of common-sense criticism and that it has adopted the conception of the objective reality of the external world in its most trivial and uncritical sense without so much as a suspicion that

<sup>88</sup> The so-called *polemica della zucca*.

\* A reference to a somewhat more realistic interpretation of subjectivism in classical German philosophy can be found in a review by G. De Ruggiero of some posthumous writings (letters, I think) of B. Constant published in *Critica* some years ago.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>89</sup> The book referred to is the *Journal intime et lettres à sa famille* of Benjamin Constant (1767-1830), reviewed in *Critica*, January 1929.

it can run into objections on the grounds of mysticism, as indeed it has.\*

However, if one analyses this idea it is not all that easy to justify a view of external objectivity understood in such a mechanical way. It might seem that there can exist an extra-historical and extra-human objectivity. But who is the judge of such objectivity? Who is able to put himself in this kind of "standpoint of the cosmos in itself" and what could such a standpoint mean? It can indeed be maintained that here we are dealing with a hangover of the concept of God, precisely in its mystic form of a conception of an unknown God. Engels' formulation that "the unity of the world consists in its materiality demonstrated by the long and laborious development of philosophy and natural science"<sup>91</sup> contains the germ of the correct conception in that it has recourse to history and to man in order to demonstrate objective reality. Objective always means "humanly objective" which can be held to correspond exactly to "historically subjective": in other words, objective would mean "universal subjective".<sup>92</sup> Man knows objectively in so far as knowledge is real for the whole human race *historically* unified in a single unitary cultural system. But this process of historical unification takes place through the disappearance of the internal contradictions which tear apart human society, while these contradictions themselves are the condition for the formation of groups and for the birth of ideologies which are not concretely universal but are immediately rendered transient by the practical origin of their substance. There exists therefore a struggle for objectivity (to free oneself from partial and fallacious ideologies) and this struggle is the same as the struggle for the cultural unification of the human race. What the idealists call "spirit" is not a point of departure but

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\* In the text presented to the London Congress the author of the *Popular Manual* refers to an accusation of mysticism, attributing it to Sombart and dismissing it contemptuously. Sombart certainly took it from Croce.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Werner Sombart (1863 1941): German economist and sociologist who became an ideologue of the conservative Right in the Weimar period.

<sup>91</sup> F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (*Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science*, translated by Emil Burns, London [n.d.], p. 54). "The real unity of the world consists in its materiality, and this is proved not by a few juggling phrases but by a long and tedious development of philosophy and natural science."

<sup>92</sup> The original phrase is *universale soggettivo* which is slightly ambiguous, as it could also be translated "subjective universal". The basic sense however would be the same: viz. that the unity of knowledge and being demanded by the subjectivists can only avoid the pitfalls of arbitrary relativism when there is a single knowing subject and an undivided human race so that knowledge becomes the same for all.



a point of arrival, it is the *ensemble* of the superstructures moving towards concrete and objectively universal unification and it is not a unitary presupposition.

Up to now experimental science has provided the terrain on which a cultural unity of this kind has reached its furthest extension. This has been the element of knowledge that has contributed most to unifying the "spirit" and making it more universal. It is the most objectivised and concretely universalised subjectivity.

The idea of "objective" in metaphysical materialism would appear to mean an objectivity that exists even apart from man; but when one affirms that a reality would exist even if man did not, one is either speaking metaphorically or one is falling into a form of mysticism. We know reality only in relation to man, and since man is historical becoming, knowledge and reality are also a becoming and so is objectivity, etc.

Engels' phrase that "the materiality of the world is demonstrated by the long and laborious development of philosophy and natural science" should be analysed and made more precise. Does science mean theoretical activity or the practical-experimental activity of scientists, or a synthesis of the two? One might say that the typical unitary process of reality is found here in the experimental activity of the scientist, which is the first model of dialectical mediation between man and nature, and the elementary historical cell through which man puts himself into relation with nature by means of technology, knows her and dominates her. There can be no doubt that the rise of the experimental method separates two historical worlds, two epochs, and initiates the process of dissolution of theology and metaphysics and the process of development of modern thought whose consummation is in the philosophy of praxis. Scientific experiment is the first cell of the new method of production, of the new form of active union of man and nature. The scientist-experimenter is also a worker, not a pure thinker, and his thought is continually controlled by practice and vice versa, until there is formed the perfect unity of theory and practice.

The neo-scholastic Casotti writes:\*

"The researches of naturalists and biologists presuppose life and real organisms already in existence", an expression which relates to that of Engels in *Anti-Dühring*.

Agreement of Catholicism and Aristotelianism on the question of the objectivity of the real.

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\* Mario Casotti, *Maestro e scolaro* [Milan, 1930], p. 49.

To understand exactly what might be meant by the problem of the reality of the external world it might be worth taking up the example of the notions of "East" and "West" which do not cease to be "objectively real" even though analysis shows them to be no more than a conventional, that is "historico-cultural" construction. (The terms "artificial" and "conventional" often indicate "historical" facts which are products of the development of civilisation and not just rationalistically arbitrary or individually contrived constructions.) One can also recall the example contained in a little book by Bertrand Russell.<sup>93</sup> Russell says approximately this: "We cannot, without the existence of man on the earth, think of the existence of London or Edinburgh, but we can think of the existence of two points in space, one to the North and one to the South, where London and Edinburgh now are." It could be objected that without the existence of man one cannot think of "thinking", one cannot think at all of any fact or relationship which exists only in so far as man exists. What would North-South or East-West mean without man? They are real relationships and yet they would not exist without man and without the development of civilisation. Obviously East and West are arbitrary and conventional, that is historical, constructions, since outside of real history every point on the earth is East and West at the same time. This can be seen more clearly from the fact that these terms have crystallised not from the point of view of a hypothetical melancholic man in general but from the point of view of the European cultured classes who, as a result of their world-wide hegemony, have caused them to be accepted everywhere. Japan is the Far East not only for Europe but also perhaps for the American from California and even for the Japanese himself, who, through English political culture, may then call Egypt the Near East. So because of the historical content that has become attached to the geographical terms, the expressions East and West have finished up indicating specific relations between different cultural complexes. Thus Italians often, when speaking of Morocco, call it an "Eastern" country, to refer to its Moslem and Arab civilisation. And yet these references are real; they correspond to real facts, they allow one to travel by land and by sea, to arrive where one has decided to arrive, to "foresee"

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<sup>93</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 1912. "The part of the earth's surface where Edinburgh stands would be North of the part where London stands even if there were no human beings to know about North and South and even if there were no minds at all in the universe." (1967 edition, p. 56.)

the future, to objectivise reality, to understand the objectivity of the external world. Rational and real become one.

Without having understood this relationship it seems that one cannot understand the philosophy of praxis, its position in comparison with idealism and with mechanical materialism, the importance and significance of the doctrine of superstructures. It is not exact, as Croce maintains, to say that in the philosophy of praxis the Hegelian "idea" has been replaced by the "concept" of structure. The Hegelian "idea" has been resolved both in the structure and in the superstructures and the whole way of conceiving philosophy has been "historicised", that is to say a new way of philosophising which is more concrete and historical than what went before it has begun to come into existence.

*Note.* One must study the position of Professor Lukács towards the philosophy of praxis. It would appear that Lukács maintains that one can speak of the dialectic only for the history of men and not for nature. He might be right and he might be wrong. If his assertion presupposes a dualism between nature and man he is wrong because he is falling into a conception of nature proper to religion and to Graeco-Christian philosophy and also to idealism which does not in reality succeed in unifying and relating man and nature to each other except verbally. But if human history should be conceived also as the history of nature (also by means of the history of science) how can the dialectic be separated from nature? Perhaps Lukács, in reaction to the baroque theories of the *Popular Manual*, has fallen into the opposite error, into a form of idealism.<sup>94</sup>

### *Judgment on Past Philosophies*

The superficial critique of subjectivism in the *Popular Manual* is part of a more general question, which is that of the attitude taken up

<sup>94</sup> It is not entirely clear on the basis of what evidence Gramsci makes this admittedly very tentative criticism. In his own essay on Bukharin's *Manual* (see introduction to this section) Lukács observes "... [the realm of the dialectic] is that of the historical process as a whole, whose individual, concrete, unrepeatable moments reveal its dialectical essence precisely in the qualitative differences between them and in the continuous transformation of their objective structure". Even in his supposedly most "idealist" work, *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács does not appear to maintain a dualism between natural and human history. Nor does the reference in OC (p. 153n) to the essay *Mein Weg zu Marx* (1933) bear out Gramsci's observation, which is probably based on reports of the criticisms of Lukács made by Deborin and others about that time.

towards past philosophies and philosophers. To judge the whole of past philosophy as delirium and folly is not only an anti-historical error in that it makes the anachronistic claim that people in the past should have thought as we do today; it is also a real hang-over from metaphysics in that it presumes a dogmatic form of thought, valid at all times and in all countries, in the light of which the past can be judged. Methodical anti-historicism is sheer metaphysics. The fact that philosophical systems have been superseded does not exclude their once having been historically valid and having performed a necessary function. The fact that they fall by the wayside is to be considered from the point of view of the entire development of history and of the real dialectic. That they were *worthy* of falling is not a moral judgment nor one of mental hygiene, made from an objective point of view, but a dialectical-historical judgment. One should compare Engels' presentation of Hegel's proposition that "all that is rational is real and the real is rational",<sup>95</sup> a proposition which should be equally valid for the past.

In the *Manual* the past is judged as "irrational" and "monstrous" and the history of philosophy becomes a historical treatise on teratology; because the starting-point is metaphysical. (*The [Communist] Manifesto*, by contrast, contains the highest praises for the world that is a-dying.) If this way of judging the past is a theoretical error, a deviation from the philosophy of praxis, can it have any educative value or inspire energetic activity? It would seem not, because the matter becomes reduced to the presumption of being someone by virtue of the simple fact of being born at the present time instead of in some past century. But in every age there has been a past and a present, and the title "contemporary" belongs strictly to the world of comic anecdote.\*

### *Immanence and the Philosophy of Praxis*

The point is made in the *Manual* that the words "immanence" and "immanent" are indeed used in the philosophy of praxis but that "evidently" this use is purely metaphorical. Fine. But is it explained what immanence and immanent "metaphorically" mean?

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<sup>95</sup> In *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*. The maxim of Hegel comes from his *Philosophy of Right*. See note 57 on p. 366.

\* The story is told of the little French bourgeois who had the word "Contemporary" printed on his visiting-card. He had thought he was a nobody and then one day he discovered he was somebody after all—he was a contemporary.

Why have these terms continued to be used and not been replaced? Is it just through a revulsion against creating new words? Usually, when a new conception replaces the previous one, the previous language continues to be used but is, precisely, used metaphorically. The whole of language is a continuous process of metaphor, and the history of semantics is an aspect of the history of culture; language is at the same time a living thing and a museum of fossils of life and civilisations. When I use the word "disaster" no one can accuse me of believing in astrology, and when I say "by Jove!" no one can assume that I am a worshipper of pagan divinities. These expressions are however a proof that modern civilisation is also a development of paganism and astrology. The term "immanence" has in the philosophy of praxis a quite precise meaning which is concealed beneath the metaphor and this meaning had to be defined and made precise. Such a definition would in reality have been genuinely "theory". The philosophy of praxis continues the philosophy of immanence but purifies it of all its metaphysical apparatus and brings it onto the concrete terrain of history. The use is metaphorical only in the sense that the old immanence has been superseded—that it has been superseded but is still assumed as a link in the process of thought out of which the new usage has come. And besides, is the new concept of immanence completely new? It would seem that in Giordano Bruno,<sup>96</sup> for example, there are many traces of a new conception of this type. The founders of the philosophy of praxis were acquainted with Bruno. They knew his writings and their marginal notes on copies of his works still survive. Furthermore, Bruno was not without influence on classical German philosophy (etc.). Here are a number of problems in the history of philosophy which could be usefully pursued.

The question of the relationship between language and metaphor is far from simple. Language, moreover, is always metaphorical. If perhaps it cannot quite be said that all discourse is metaphorical in respect of the thing or material and sensible object referred to (or the abstract concept) so as not to widen the concept of metaphor excessively, it can however be said that present language is metaphorical with respect to the meanings and the ideological content which the words used had in preceding periods of civilisation. A

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<sup>96</sup> The notion that the thought of Bruno, together with that of other unorthodox sixteenth-century philosophers such as Telesius and Campanella, contained the germs of a "modern" anti-transcendentalist form of thought is one that has been repeatedly put forward by idealist commentators since Croce and has received reserved support even from Marxists.

treatise of semantics (that of Michel Bréal<sup>97</sup> for example) can provide an historically and critically reconstructed catalogue of the semantic mutations of given groups of words. A failure to take account of this fact, that is to say the absence of a critical and historicist conception of the phenomenon of language, can lead to many errors in both the scientific and the practical field:

1. An error of an aesthetic nature, which today is increasingly being corrected but which in the past used to be a dominant doctrine, is the notion that certain expressions as opposed to others are "beautiful" in themselves in that they are crystallised metaphors: rhetoricians and grammarians drool on about certain little phrases in which they discern God knows what abstract artistic virtues and essentiality. The purely bookish "joy" of the philologist ecstatic over the result of some of his etymological or semantic researches is confused with artistic enjoyment proper. A recent pathological example of this is the case of Giulio Bertoni's *Linguaggio e Poesia*.

2. A practical error which has many adherents is the utopia of fixed and universal languages.

3. An arbitrary trend towards neologism, which arises from the question posed by Pareto and the pragmatists about "language as a source of error".<sup>98</sup> Both Pareto and the pragmatists claim to have originated a new conception of the world or at least to have renewed a particular science and therefore to have given a new meaning or at least a new nuance to words or to have created new concepts. They then find themselves faced with the fact that traditional words, particularly as commonly used but also in the usage of the educated classes and even in the usage of specialists in the same science, continue to retain their old meaning despite the change of content, and they react against it. Pareto creates his own "dictionary", demonstrating his tendency to create his own "pure" or "mathematical" language. The pragmatists theorise abstractly about language as a source of error (see Prezzolini's little book). But is it possible to remove from language its metaphorical and extensive meanings? It is not possible. Language is transformed with the transformation of the whole of civilisation, through the acquisition of culture by new classes and through the hegemony exercised by one national language over others, etc., and what it

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<sup>97</sup> M. Bréal, *Essai de sémantique*, Paris, 1897: English translation, *Semantics, Studies in the Science of Meaning*, London, 1900.

<sup>98</sup> See p. 348.

does is precisely to absorb in metaphorical form the words of previous civilisations and cultures. Nobody today thinks that the word "dis-aster" is connected with astrology or can claim to be misled about the opinions of someone who uses the word. Similarly even an atheist can speak of "dis-grace" without being thought to be a believer in predestination (etc.).<sup>99</sup> The new "metaphorical" meaning spreads with the spread of the new culture, which furthermore also coins brand-new words or absorbs them from other languages as loan-words giving them a precise meaning and therefore depriving them of the extensive halo they possessed in the original language. Thus it is probable that for many people the term "immanence" is known, understood and used for the first time only in the new "metaphorical" sense given to it by the philosophy of praxis.

### *Questions of Nomenclature and Content*

One of the characteristics of the intellectuals as a crystallised social group (one, that is, which sees itself as continuing uninterrupted through history and thus independent of the struggle of groups<sup>100</sup> rather than as the expression of a dialectical process through which every dominant social group elaborates its own category of intellectuals) is precisely that of connecting itself, in the ideological sphere, with a preceding intellectual category by means of a common conceptual nomenclature. Every new social organism (type of society) creates a new superstructure whose specialised representatives and standard-bearers (the intellectuals) can only be conceived as themselves being "new" intellectuals who have come

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<sup>99</sup> Literally "dis-grace" means the withdrawal of Divine Grace, and therefore logically implies a notion of predestination. Similarly "dis-aster" refers to an unfavourable conjunction of the stars. Both words have, however, lost their original connotations in the modern language. On the other hand, as Gramsci points out in another note (MS. 159), the case for systematic neologism as a means of avoiding any possible confusion in the application of terms has a long and interesting history. In this note Gramsci refers to a conversation with Napoleon in 1805, recalled by Pietro Giordani some years later, in which Napoleon is reported to have said "... I think that in science when something really new is discovered a completely new word must be given to it, so that the idea remains precise and distinct. If you give a new meaning to an old word, then however strongly you assert that the new idea attached to that word has nothing in common with the idea newly attributed to it the human mind cannot ever refrain from imagining some resemblance and connection between the old and the new idea."

<sup>100</sup> Euphemism (for reasons of censorship) for the class struggle. For the notion below of the dominant social group elaborating its own category of intellectuals see the essay "The Formation of the Intellectuals", pp. 5-14.

out of the new situation and are not a continuation of the preceding intellectual milieu. If the "new" intellectuals put themselves forward as the direct continuation of the previous "intelligentsia", they are not new at all (that is, not tied to the new social group which organically represents the new historical situation) but are a conservative and fossilised left-over of the social group which has been historically superseded. (This is another way of saying that the new historical situation has not reached the level of development necessary for it to have the capacity to create new superstructures but continues to live in the worm-eaten integument of old history.)

It must however be borne in mind that no new historical situation, however radical the change that has brought it about, completely transforms language, at least in its external formal aspect. But the content of language must be changed, even if it is difficult to have an exact consciousness of the change in immediate terms. The phenomenon is, moreover, historically complex and complicated by the existence of characteristic cultures among the various strata of the new social group, some of whom, in the ideological field, are still immersed in the culture of preceding historical situations, including sometimes the one that has most recently been superseded. A class some of whose strata still have a Ptolemaic conception of the world can none the less be the representative of a very advanced historical situation. Ideologically backward (or at least in certain aspects of their conception of the world, which remains disconnected and ingenuous), these strata are nevertheless very advanced on a practical level, in terms, that is, of economic and political function. If the task of the intellectuals is to determine and to organise the reform of moral and intellectual life, in words to fit culture to the sphere of practice, it is clear that "crystallised" intellectuals are conservative and reactionary. For while the new social group at least feels itself split off and distinct from its predecessor, these intellectuals are not even conscious of this distinction, but think that they can reconnect themselves with the past.

This is not to say, however, that the whole heritage of the past must be rejected. There are "instrumental values" which cannot but be absorbed in their entirety in order to continue to be elaborated and refined. But how is one to distinguish the instrumental value from the transient philosophical value that has to be rejected outright? It often happens that, because one has accepted a transient philosophical value belonging to a particular past tendency, one then rejects an instrumental value from another tendency because it conflicts with the first, even though this instrumental



value could have been useful to express the new historical cultural content.

Thus we have seen the term "materialism" accepted with its past content, while the term "immanence" was rejected because in the past it had a particular historical cultural content. The difficulty of fitting literary expression to conceptual content and the confusion of questions of terminology with questions of substance and vice versa is typical of philosophical dilettantism and of the lack of an historical sense in grasping the different moments of a process of cultural development, typical, in other words, of an anti-dialectical and dogmatic conception, imprisoned within the abstract schemas of formal logic.

The term "materialism" in the first fifty years of the nineteenth century should be understood not only in its restricted technical philosophical sense but with the more extended meaning that it acquired polemically in the debates that grew up in Europe with the rise and victorious development of modern culture. The name materialism was given to any philosophical doctrine which excluded transcendence from the realm of thought. It was given therefore, not only to pantheism and immanentism, but to any practical attitude inspired by political realism—i.e. to any that was opposed to certain of the worst currents of political romanticism such as the popularisations of the doctrines of Mazzini<sup>101</sup> which carried on all the time about "missions" and "ideals" and suchlike vague, nebulous and sentimental abstractions. Even today in Catholic polemics the term materialism is often used in this sense; materialism is the opposite of spiritualism in the strict sense, i.e. religious spiritualism, and therefore one can include under the heading materialism the whole of Hegelianism and classical German philosophy in general, as well as sensationalism and the philosophy of the French Enlightenment. Similarly, in the terminology of common sense, materialism includes everything that tends to locate the purpose of life on this earth and not in paradise. Any form of

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<sup>101</sup> Not only the popularisations but Mazzini's original doctrines themselves were in point of fact extremely vague and devoid of content. Despite his active participation in the Roman Republic of 1849, Mazzini never succeeded, particularly in the crucial years 1860-70, in formulating a clear policy towards the position of the Church and the Papacy, and his slogan "*Dio e popolo*" (God and People) provided a political and ideological cover for all sorts of liberal and neo-Catholic sentimentalisms. On an ideological level (and Mazzini's influence after 1850 was mainly ideological rather than directly political) Mazzinianism represented the degeneration of the romantic patriotic impulse of the Risorgimento, co-incidental with the rise of "materialistic" positivism.

economic activity which went beyond the bounds of mediaeval production was "materialism" because it seemed an "end in itself", economics for the sake of economics, activity for the sake of activity, just as today for the average European America is "materialist" because the use of machinery and the scale of firms and businesses goes beyond the limit which the average European considers "just"—that within which "spiritual" demands are not mortified. Thus a polemical riposte made by feudal culture against the developing bourgeoisie has now been appropriated by European bourgeois culture, on the one hand against a more developed form of capitalism than the European, and on the other hand against the practical activity of subaltern social groups. (For these groups at the outset and for a whole historical epoch, until they have been able to construct an economy and a social structure of their own, activity cannot but be prevalently economic or at least expressed in economic and structural terms.) Traces of this conception of materialism remain in language. The German *geistlich* [spiritual] also means "clerical", proper to the clergy, and so does the Russian *dukhoviez*. How prevalent it is can be seen from many writers of the philosophy of praxis, for whom, precisely, religion, theism, etc., are the points of reference for recognising "thorough-going materialists".

One of the reasons, and perhaps the most important, for the reduction of historical materialism to traditional metaphysical materialism is to be looked for in the fact that historical materialism could not but be a mainly critical and polemical phase of philosophy, while there was a need for an achieved and perfected system. But achieved and perfected systems are always the work of single philosophers, and in them, side by side with the historically relevant part, the part, that is, which corresponds to contemporary conditions of life, there always exists an abstract part, which is "ahistorical" in the sense that it is tied to preceding philosophies and corresponds to external pedantic necessities of the architecture of the system or is due to personal idiosyncracies. Therefore the philosophy of an epoch cannot be any systematic tendency or individual system. It is the *ensemble* of all individual philosophies and philosophical tendencies, plus scientific opinions, religion and common sense. Can a system of this type be created artificially? And if so, by individuals or by groups? Critical activity is the only kind possible, particularly in the sense of posing and resolving critically the problems that present themselves as an expression of historical development. But the first problem which has to be formulated and understood is this: that the new philosophy cannot coincide with any past system,

under whatever name. Identity of terms does not mean identity of concepts.

A book worth looking at in connection with this question is Lange's *History of Materialism*.<sup>102</sup> This work may have been more or less superseded by subsequent studies of individual materialist philosophers, but from our point of view its cultural importance remains intact. A whole series of adherents of historical materialism have referred to it, for information on their forerunners and for the fundamental concepts of materialism. It could be said, schematically, that what has happened is this. One starts from the dogmatic presupposition that historical materialism is straightforward traditional materialism slightly revised and corrected (corrected by the "dialectic", which therefore becomes absorbed as a chapter of formal logic and not as a logic of its own, that is a theory of knowledge); and one then studies in Lange what traditional materialism was, and concepts of this materialism are represented as the concepts of historical materialism. So that it could be said that the major part of the corpus of concepts that goes under the label of historical materialism have as their founder and fountainhead none other than Lange. For this reason the study of this work is of great cultural and critical interest, all the more so because Lange is a conscientious and acute historian who has a quite precise, definite and limited conception of materialism and therefore, to the great surprise and even indignation of certain people (such as Plekhanov) does not regard as materialist either historical materialism or even the philosophy of Feuerbach.<sup>103</sup> Here again one can see how the terminology is conventional but not without importance in making for errors and deviations as soon as one forgets that it is always necessary to return to the cultural sources in order to identify the exact value of concepts, since there may be different heads under the same hat. It is well known, moreover, that the originator of the philosophy of praxis [Marx] never called his own conception materialist and that when writing about French materialism he criticises it and affirms that the critique ought to be more exhaustive.<sup>104</sup> Thus he never uses the formula "materialist dialectic", but

<sup>102</sup> Friedrich Albert Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart*, 2nd revised edition 1873 75.

<sup>103</sup> Feuerbachian materialism, as defined and attacked in *The German Ideology* and in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, is not strictly materialist in that it is founded on a basic dualism between an objective reality and a separate realm of human subjectivity.

<sup>104</sup> The reference would appear to be to the section on French Materialism in *The Holy Family* (VI, 3(d)), except that in this section Marx is far less critical of French Materialism in its classic form than Gramsci suggests.

calls it "rational" as opposed to "mystical", which gives the term "rational" a quite precise meaning.\*<sup>105</sup>

*Science and the Instruments of Science*

It is affirmed, in the *Popular Manual*, that the progress of science is dependent, as an effect from a cause, on the development of the instruments of science. This is a corollary of the general principle adopted by the *Manual*, originating with Loria,<sup>106</sup> about the historical function of the "instrument of production and work" (which is substituted for the *ensemble* of social relations of production). But in the science of geology no instruments except a hammer are used and the technical progress in hammers is in no way comparable with progress in geology. If the history of sciences can be reduced, as the *Manual* claims, to the history of their particular instruments, how can one produce a history of geology? It is no good saying that geology is based also on the progress of a complex of other sciences so that the history of the instruments of these sciences helps to describe the history of geology, because with this let-out one ends up with an empty generalisation and a recourse to ever-wider movements right up to the relations of production. It is very apt that the motto of geology should be "mente et malleo" [with the mind and with the hammer].

It can be said in general that the advance of science cannot be *materially* documented. The history of the sciences can at most be brought alive in the memory, and that not in all cases, through the description of the successive perfecting of the instruments which have been one means of advance and through the description of the machines which have been applications of the science itself. The principal "instruments" of scientific progress are of an intellectual (and even political) and methodological order, and Engels has written<sup>107</sup> that "intellectual instruments" are not born from

\* On this question it is worth looking again at the essays of Antonio Labriola.

<sup>105</sup> See Marx's Afterword to the Second German Edition of *Capital*, where he argues that in Hegel the dialectic stood on its head and that in order to make it stand properly on its feet it is necessary to extract the rational kernel from the mystic shell. The rational dialectic, therefore, is defined in specific opposition to the way it was developed by Hegel, but this is not tantamount to saying that from "idealist" it should become "materialist", which is a Feuerbachian rather than a Marxist conception.

<sup>106</sup> For Loria see note 108 on p. 458.

<sup>107</sup> See Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (cit.), Introduction, "... The art of working with concepts is not inborn and also is not given with ordinary everyday consciousness, but requires real thought, and ... this thought similarly has a long empirical history, not more and not less than empirical natural science."

See also the Letter to Starkenburg (cit. above, note 74).

nothing and are not innate in man, but are acquired, have developed and are developing historically. How great a contribution to the progress of science was made by the expulsion from the scientific fields of the authority of Aristotle and the Bible? And was not this expulsion due to the general progress of modern society? Recall the example of theories on the origin of springs. The first exact formulation of the way that springs are produced is to be found in the *Encyclopaedia* of Diderot, etc. While the ordinary people can be shown to have had correct opinions on the question before then, in the scientific world there were a succession of the most arbitrary and bizarre theories which aimed to reconcile the Bible and Aristotle with the experimental observations of good sense.

Another question is this. If the affirmation in the *Manual* were true, what would distinguish the history of the sciences from the history of technology? With the development of the "material" instruments of science, which begins historically with the coming of the experimental method, a particular science has developed, the science of instruments, which is closely connected with the general development of production and technology.\*

How superficial the affirmation in the *Manual* is can be seen from the example of the mathematical sciences which have no need of any material instruments (the development of the abacus, is not, I think, a valid counter-example) and which are themselves an "instrument" of all the natural sciences.

### *The "Technical Instrument"*

The notion of the "technical instrument" in the *Popular Manual* is completely mistaken. From Croce's essay on Achille Loria<sup>108</sup> in *Materialismo storico ed economia marxistica* it seems that Loria was the first person who arbitrarily (or else through the puerile desire

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\* On this question see G. Boffito, *Gli strumenti della scienza e la scienza degli strumenti*, Libreria Internazionale Seeber, Firenze, 1929.

<sup>108</sup> Croce's essay on Loria dates from 1896, when Croce was a Marxist, albeit of an unorthodox kind, and was reprinted in the volume *Materialismo storico ed economia marxistica* (1900. Collected Works, Vol. II, 4, pp. 23-56). Basically it is an amplification of the attack on Loria's vulgarisation and plagiarism of Marx made by Engels in the Preface to *Capital*, Vol. II. Achille Loria (1857-1943) was an academic economist who put himself forward as an original thinker and enjoyed a certain vogue, not only in Italy, in the 1880s and 1890s. Loria's theory, to which he gave the name "historical economism", was a mish-mash of vulgar economy and vulgar Marxism, of no intrinsic distinction but interesting, in Gramsci's eyes, as an example of "certain degenerate and bizarre aspects of the mentality of a group of Italian intellectuals and therefore of the national culture. . .". (Int. p. 169) to which he gave the name "*lorianismo*".

for original discovery) put the expression "technical instrument" in the place of "material forces of production" or "complex of social relations".

The Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* states:

"In the social production of their life men enter into relations with each other which are determined, necessary and independent of their will, that is into relations of production, which correspond to a given level of development of the material forces of production. The ensemble of these relations constitutes the economic structure of society, in other words the real base on top of which is raised a political and juridical superstructure and to which correspond given social forms of consciousness. . . . At a given point in their development, the material productive forces of society enter into contradiction with the pre-existing relations of production (that is the property relations, which is the juridical equivalent of that expression) within which these forces had previously moved. These relations of production, from a form of development of the productive forces, are converted into an obstacle to them. And then there arrives an age of social revolution. With the change in the economic base the colossal overhanging superstructure is revolutionised and collapses more or less rapidly . . . A social formation does not perish until all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed and new relations of production do not take their place until the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the existing society."

(Translation by Antonio Labriola in his essay, *In Memoria* [In Memory of the Communist Manifesto].)<sup>109</sup>

And here is a rehash by Loria (taken from *La terra e il sistema sociale*, p. 19, Verona, Drucker, 1892; Croce maintains that similar statements are to be found in other writings of Loria):

"To a certain stage of the productive instrument there corresponds, and is built upon it, a given system of production, and

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<sup>109</sup> Quoted in Croce, *Materialismo* (cit.), pp. 41-2, which is also the source for the Loria quotation and certain further remarks below. Since Gramsci had access to few Marxist texts while in prison, this quotation from Marx, here retranslated from the Italian version, came to assume exceptional importance for him.

thus of economic relations, which then shape the whole mode of being of society. But the incessant evolution of productive methods generates sooner or later a radical metamorphosis of the technical instrument which renders intolerable the system of production and economy on which the previous stage of technique was founded. Then the outdated economic form is destroyed through a social revolution and replaced by a superior economic form, which corresponds to the new phase of the productive instrument."

Croce adds that in *Capital* (volume I, Ch. III, sec. 3, and Ch. XIV) and elsewhere the importance of technical inventions is stressed and a history of techniques is invoked, but that there is no text in which the "technical instrument" is turned into the unique and supreme cause of economic development. The passage from *Zur Kritik* contains the phrases "level of development of the material forces of production", "mode of production of material life", "economic conditions of production" and the like, which certainly affirm that economic development is determined by material conditions, but it never reduces these to the mere "metamorphosis of the technical instrument". Croce then adds that the founder of the philosophy of praxis never framed his enquiry around the ultimate cause of economic life. "His philosophy was not that cheap. He had not 'flirted' in vain with the Hegelian dialectic to go then in search of ultimate causes."<sup>110</sup>

It is worth noting that the *Popular Manual* does not quote the passage from the Preface to the *Zur Kritik* nor even refer to it. This is pretty strange, given that this is the most important authentic source for a reconstruction of the philosophy of praxis.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, in this respect the mode of thinking expounded in the *Manual* is no different from that of Loria, if not indeed even more superficial and open to criticism. It is hard to tell what the *Manual* means by structure, superstructure or technical instrument. All its general concepts are nebulous and vague. The technical instrument is

<sup>110</sup> Croce, *op. cit.*, p. 43. For Marx's "flirting" or "coquetting" (*kokettieren*) with Hegel see the Afterword to *Capital*, I.

<sup>111</sup> See "Questions of Method", pp. 382-386 above. Gramsci's position was that Marx, engaged for the last years of his life on the concrete study of economics, left behind little writing of a philosophical nature, with the result that the gaps in Marx's philosophy tended to be filled by Engels. With these restrictions, reinforced by the fact that Gramsci either could not or did not know certain works of Marx whose importance has emerged subsequently, his emphasis on the unique importance of the Preface is of extreme importance, both as a source for Gramsci's own Marxism and as a guideline for other Marxists.

conceived in such a generic way that it can mean any form of equipment or utensil, including the instruments used by scientists in their experiments and . . . musical instruments. This way of treating the question just makes matters uselessly complicated.

If one starts from this baroque way of thinking a whole series of baroque questions are thrown up. For example, are libraries structure or superstructure? Or the specialised laboratories of scientists? If it can be maintained that an art or a science is developed through the developments of its technical instruments, why could one not maintain quite the contrary or argue that certain instrumental forms are structure and superstructure at the same time? Thus it could be said that certain superstructures have a particular structure of their own while remaining superstructures. The art of typography would be the material structure of a whole series of ideologies, indeed of all ideologies, and the existence of the printing industry would be sufficient to provide a materialistic justification of the whole of history. There would then remain the case of pure mathematics and algebra which, having no instruments of their own, could not develop. It is clear that the whole theory of the technical instrument in the *Manual* is pure *abracadabra* and comparable to the theory of memory concocted by Croce to explain why artists are not content to conceive their works purely in an ideal form but write them or sculpt them, etc. (with Tilgher's phenomenal objection that in the case of architecture it would be a bit much to think of an engineer constructing a building just to preserve the memory of his idea). There is no doubt that all this is just an infantile deviation of the philosophy of praxis generated by the baroque conviction that the more one goes back to "material" objects the more orthodox one must be.

### *Objection to empiricism*

An enquiry into a series of facts to discover the relations between them presupposes a "concept" that permits one to distinguish that series from other possible series of facts. How can there take place a choice of facts to be adduced as proof of the truth of one's own assumption if one does not have a pre-existing criterion of choice? But what is this criterion of choice to be, if not something superior to each single fact under enquiry? An intuition, a conception, which must be regarded as having a complex history, a process that is to be connected with the whole process of the development of culture (etc.). This observation may be connected with the other



one on the "sociological law", in which one simply repeats the same fact twice, the first time as a fact and the second time as a law, and which is a sophism of the double fact and not a law at all.

*Concept of "orthodoxy"*

From a few of the points developed above it emerges that the concept of "orthodoxy" requires to be renewed and brought back to its authentic origins. Orthodoxy is not to be looked for in this or that adherent of the philosophy of praxis, or in this or that tendency connected with currents extraneous to the original doctrine, but in the fundamental concept that the philosophy of praxis is "sufficient unto itself", that it contains in itself all the fundamental elements needed to construct a total and integral conception of the world, a total philosophy and theory of natural science, and not only that but everything that is needed to give life to an integral practical organisation of society, that is, to become a total integral civilisation.

This concept of orthodoxy, thus renewed, helps to give a better definition of the attribute "revolutionary" which is applied with such facility to various conceptions of the world, theories or philosophies. Christianity was revolutionary in relation to paganism because it was an element of complete split between the supporters of the old and new worlds. A theory is "revolutionary" precisely to the extent that it is an element of conscious separation and distinction into two camps and is a peak inaccessible to the enemy camp. To maintain that the philosophy of praxis is not a completely autonomous and independent structure of thought in antagonism to all traditional philosophies and religions, means in reality that one has not severed one's links with the old world, if indeed one has not actually capitulated. The philosophy of praxis has no need of support from alien sources. It is sufficiently robust and rich in new truths for the old world to come to it to supply itself with a more modern and efficacious arsenal of weapons. This means that the philosophy of praxis is beginning to exercise its own hegemony over traditional culture. But traditional culture, which is still strong and above all is more polished and refined, is trying to react like Greece in defeat which finished by vanquishing its uncouth Roman conqueror.

It could be said that a large part of the philosophy of Croce represents this attempt to reabsorb the philosophy of praxis and incorporate it as the handmaid of traditional culture. But, as the

*Manual* demonstrates, even some self-styled "orthodox" adherents of the philosophy of praxis fall into the trap and themselves conceive their philosophy as subordinated to a general (vulgar) materialist philosophy just as others are to idealism. (This does not mean that there are no points of relationship between the philosophy of praxis and the old philosophies, but they are less than those that exist between Christianity and Greek philosophy.) In Otto Bauer's little book on religion<sup>112</sup> one can find a number of references to the combinations that have been given rise to by this erroneous notion that the philosophy of praxis is not autonomous and independent but needs the support, as need arises, of some other materialist or idealist philosophy. Bauer maintains as a political thesis the agnosticism of parties and the granting of permission to party members to group themselves into idealists, materialists, atheists, catholics, etc.

*Note.* People tend to look for a general philosophy underlying the philosophy of praxis and implicitly to deny to it any originality of content and method. One case of this error would appear to be this: that a confusion is made between on the one hand the personal culture of the founder of the philosophy of praxis, i.e. the philosophical currents and the great philosophers in which he was very interested in his youth and whose language he often reproduces (always however with detachment and often with the observation that he uses it in order to make his own concept easier to understand) and on the other the origins or constituent parts of the philosophy of praxis. This error has a long history, particularly in the field of literary criticism. It is well known that the business of reducing great poetic works to their sources became at one period the major task of many distinguished scholars. This problem comes up in its external form in so-called plagiaries, but it is also true that even in the case of a number of "plagiaries" and indeed literal reproductions it is not impossible to claim originality for the plagiarism or reproduction.<sup>113</sup> Two notable examples can be cited: 1. the sonnet of Tansillo reproduced by Giordano Bruno in *Degli eroici furori* (or in *La Cena delle Ceneri*) "Poiché spiegate ho l'ali al bel desio", which in Tansillo was a love poem to the Marchesa del

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<sup>112</sup> Otto Bauer, *Sozialdemokratie, Religion und Kirche*. See note 13 on p. 387.

<sup>113</sup> Gramsci says "*per l'opera plagiata o riprodotta*", which is presumably a slip of the pen.

Vasto;<sup>114</sup> 2. the verses for the dead of Dogali which D'Annunzio put forward as his own, having in fact copied them word for word from a collection by Tommaseo of Serbian songs.<sup>115</sup> In both Bruno and D'Annunzio these reproductions acquire a new and original flavour which makes one forget their origins.

The study of the philosophical culture of a man like Marx is not only interesting but necessary. But one must not forget that it belongs exclusively to the field of the reconstruction of his intellectual biography. The elements of Spinoza, Feuerbach, Hegel, French materialism, etc., are in no way essential parts of the philosophy of praxis, nor can that philosophy be reduced to those elements. What is interesting is precisely the transcending of the old philosophies, the new synthesis or the elements of a new synthesis and the way of conceiving philosophy. One should further bear in mind that the elements of this new mode of conceiving philosophy are contained in aphorisms or in some way dispersed throughout the writings of the founder of the philosophy of praxis, and that it is necessary precisely to distinguish these elements and develop them coherently. At the level of theory the philosophy of praxis cannot be confounded with or reduced to any other philosophy. Its originality lies not only in its transcending of previous philosophies but also and above all in that it opens up a completely new road, renewing from head to toe the whole way of conceiving philosophy itself. At the level of historical biographical research, however, one can study those interests which provided the occasion for the philosophical activity of the founder of the philosophy of praxis. Here one should bear in mind the psychology of the young scholar who every so often allows himself to be intellectually attracted by whatever new current he is studying and examining and who forms his own individuality as a result of this very process—a critical spirit and a power of original thought being generated as a result of having tried out and compared with each other so many contrasting ideas. For this one must therefore locate which

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<sup>114</sup> Luigi Tansillo (1510-1568) was a minor Renaissance poet, who appears as one of the imaginary interlocutors of Giordano Bruno's dialogue *Degli eroici furori*. In the dialogue Tansillo acts as the mouthpiece for Bruno's philosophy and, as in this example from Dialogue III, is made to quote some of his own love poetry as if its content were a desire not for a woman but for knowledge. The aesthetic significance of this is discussed by Croce in an essay in *Problemi di estetica* (1910) which is also Gramsci's source.

<sup>115</sup> The battle of Dogali (1887) involved the annihilation of an entire Italian advance guard during the imperialist campaign in Eritrea.

elements he has incorporated and made homogeneous with his own thought and especially what is new creation. There is no doubt that Hegelianism is (relatively speaking) the most important of the philosophical motivations of our author, particularly because it attempted to go beyond the traditional conceptions of idealism and materialism in a new synthesis which undoubtedly had a quite exceptional importance and which represents a world-historical moment of philosophical inquiry. So when the *Manual* says that the term "immanence" in the philosophy of praxis is used in a metaphorical sense, it is saying nothing. In reality the term immanence has here acquired a special meaning which is not that of the "pantheists" nor any other metaphysical meaning but one which is new and needs to be specified. It has been forgotten that in the case of a very common expression [historical materialism] one should put the accent on the first term—"historical"—and not on the second, which is of metaphysical origin. The philosophy of praxis is absolute "historicism", the absolute secularisation and earthliness of thought, an absolute humanism of history. It is along this line that one must trace the thread of the new conception of the world.

### "Matter"

What does the *Popular Manual* mean by matter? A popular handbook, even more than a book for specialists, particularly a book like this which claims to be the first of its kind, must define exactly not only its fundamental concepts, but its entire terminology, in order to avoid the sources of error deriving from the popular and vulgar usages of scientific words. Clearly, for the philosophy of praxis, "matter" should be understood neither in the meaning that it has acquired in natural science (physics, chemistry, mechanics, etc.—meanings to be noted and studied in the terms of their historical development), nor in any of the meanings that one finds in the various materialistic metaphysics. The various physical (chemical, mechanical, etc.) properties of matter which together constitute matter itself (unless one is to fall back on a conception of the Kantian noumenon)<sup>116</sup> should be considered, but only to the extent that they become a productive "economic element". Matter as such therefore is not our subject but how it is socially and historically organised for production, and natural science should be

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<sup>116</sup> See note 61 on p. 367.

seen correspondingly as essentially an historical category, a human relation. Has the *ensemble* of the properties of all forms of matter always been the same? The history of the technical sciences shows that it has not. For how long was the mechanical power of steam neglected? Can it be claimed that this mechanical power existed before it was harnessed by man-made machines? Might it not be said in a sense, and up to a certain point, that what nature provides the opportunity for are not discoveries and inventions of pre-existing forces—of pre-existing qualities of matter—but “creations”, which are closely linked to the interests of society and to the development and further necessities of development of the forces of production? And might not the idealistic conception<sup>117</sup> according to which nature is none other than the economic category be reduced, once cleansed of its speculative superstructures, into the terms of the philosophy of praxis and demonstrated to be historically linked to and a development of that philosophy? In reality the philosophy of praxis does not study a machine in order to know about and to establish the atomic structure of its materials or the physical, chemical and mechanical properties of its natural components (which is the business of the exact sciences and of technology) but only in so far as it is a moment of the material forces of production, is an object of property of particular social forces, and expresses a social relation which in turn corresponds to a particular historical period. The ensemble of the material forces of production is the least variable element in historical development: it is the one which at any given time can be ascertained and measured with mathematical exactitude and can therefore give rise to observations and criteria of an experimental character and thus to the reconstruction of a solid skeleton of the historical process. The variability of the ensemble of the material forces of production can also be measured, and one can establish with a fair degree of precision the point at which its development ceases to be merely quantitative and becomes qualitative. The ensemble of the material forces of production is at the same time a crystallisation of all past history and the basis of present and future history: it is both a document and an active and actual propulsive force. But the concept of activity applied to forces of this kind must not be confused or even compared with activity in either the physical or the meta-physical sense. Electricity is historically active, not merely however

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<sup>117</sup> In Crocean metaphysics “Economics” is a distinct “category”, along with Logic, Aesthetics and Ethics. See General Introduction and also note 58 on p. 366.

as a natural force (e.g. an electrical discharge which causes a fire) but as a productive element dominated by man and incorporated into the ensemble of the material forces of production, an object of private property. As an abstract natural force electricity existed even before its reduction to a productive force, but it was not historically operative and was just a subject of hypothetical discourse in natural history (earlier still it was historical "nothingness", since no one was interested in it or indeed knew anything about it).

These observations help to explain how the element of causality used by the natural sciences to explain human history is in fact quite an arbitrary assumption, if not actually a return to old ideological interpretations. For example the *Manual* affirms that modern atomic theory destroys individualism (Robinsonades).<sup>118</sup> But what does this mean? What is implied in this juxtaposition of politics and scientific theories, if not that history is moved by these scientific theories, in other words by ideologies? So that by trying to be ultra-materialist one falls into a baroque form of abstract idealism. And it cannot be maintained that it is not atomic theory but the natural reality that the theory observes and describes that has destroyed individualism, but without falling into further complicated contradictions in that this natural reality is supposed to be prior to the theory and therefore already operative even when individualism was at its height. How could "atomistic" reality, if it is and was a natural law, not have been always in operation but have needed the construction of a theory on the part of mankind for it to come into operation? Do men only obey the laws they know, as if these laws were Acts of Parliament? And who could have imposed on mankind observation of laws of which they were unaware, on the principle of modern legislation according to which ignorance of the law is no excuse? Nor, again, can it be held that the laws of a given natural science are identical with the laws of history, or that, because the whole complex of scientific ideas is a homogeneous unity, one can reduce one science to another or one law to another. For in this case by what right does this particular element of physics rather than any other become the one that can be reduced to the unity of the conception of the world?

This is indeed just one of many elements in the *Popular Manual* which demonstrate the superficial way in which it has posed the

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<sup>118</sup> "Robinsonades" is the name given (e.g. by Marx) to the speculative reasoning that derives forms of social life from the needs of an imaginary isolated individual, after the pattern of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.

problem of the philosophy of praxis and its failure to give to this conception of the world its proper scientific autonomy and the position due to it in relation to natural science—or even, what is worse, in relation to that vague concept of science in general which is typical of the vulgar popular conception which regards even conjuring tricks as science. Is modern atomic theory a “definitive” theory, established once and for all? What scientist would dare make such an assertion? Might it not rather be simply a scientific hypothesis which may be superseded, that is to say, absorbed into a vaster and more comprehensive theory? Why then should reference to this theory be so decisive and have put an end to the question of individualism and of Robinsonades? (Quite apart from the fact that Robinsonades can sometimes be practical models constructed to indicate a tendency or for the purposes of a demonstration *ad absurdum*: even the author of the critical economy [Marx] had recourse to Robinsonades.) But there are further questions. If atomic theory is what the *Manual* makes it out to be, given that the history of society is a series of upheavals and there have been many forms of society whereas atomic theory would appear to be the reflection of an ever-constant natural reality, how then has society not always obeyed this law? Or is it being claimed that the change from the mediaeval corporate regime to economic individualism was anti-scientific, a mistake of history and of nature? According to the theory of praxis it is evident that it is not atomic theory that explains human history but the other way about: in other words that atomic theory and all scientific hypotheses and opinions are superstructures.\*

### *Quantity and Quality*

In the *Popular Manual* it is said (but only in passing, for the assertion is not justified or evaluated and does not express a fertile concept, but is casual, with no links with what goes before or comes after) that every society is more than the mere sum of its individual components. This is true in the abstract, but what does it mean concretely? The explanation given—empirically—is often baroque. It is said that a hundred cows taken one at a time are quite different from a hundred cows together which are then a herd—thus reducing the question to one of terminology. Similarly it is said that in

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\* Atomistic theory can be used to explain biological man as an aggregate of various bodies and so explain the society of man. Talk about a comprehensive theory!

numbers when we get to twelve we have a dozen, as if there didn't also exist couples, triplets and quartets, etc., i.e. simply different ways of counting. The most concrete theoretico-practical explanation, however, is that to be found in the first volume of *Capital*, where it is demonstrated that in the factory system there exists a quota of production which cannot be attributed to any individual worker but to the ensemble of the labour force, to collective man. A similar process takes place for the whole of society, which is based on the division of labour and of functions and for this reason is worth more than the sum of its parts. How the philosophy of praxis has "concretised" the Hegelian law about quantity becoming quality is another of those knotty theoretical problems which the *Popular Manual* does not go into but regards as already known, contenting itself with wordplay about water changing its state (ice, liquid, gas) with changes in temperature, a purely mechanical fact determined by external agents (fire, sun, evaporation of carbonic acid, etc.).

In the case of man, who is this external agent? In the factory it is the division of labour, etc., conditions created by man himself. In society it is the ensemble of productive forces. But the author of the *Manual* has not considered that, if every social aggregate is something more (and different) than the sum of its components, this must mean that the law or principle which explains the development of society cannot be a physical law, since in physics one does not get out of the quantitative sphere except metaphorically. However, in the philosophy of praxis quality is also connected to quantity and this connection is perhaps its most fertile contribution. Idealism, on the other hand, hypostasises this mysterious something else known as quality, it makes it into an entity of its own, "spirit", just as religion had done with the idea of divinity. But if the notion of quality is a hypostasis in religious thought and in idealism, that is to say an arbitrary abstraction rather than a process of analytical distinction necessary for explanatory purposes, then the same is true in the case of vulgar materialism, which "divinises" a hypostasis of matter.

This way of looking at the conception of society should be compared with the conception of the State typical of the actual idealists.<sup>119</sup> For the actualists the State has ended up being precisely this sort of entity superior to individuals (though in the light of the consequences derived by Spirito from the idealist identification of

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<sup>119</sup> See succeeding note and also note 70 on p. 424.



State and individual in relation to property, Gentile in *L'Educazione Fascista* of August 1932 has been careful to make some qualifications.<sup>120</sup> The ideas of the vulgar actualists had degenerated into such parrot talk that the only possible critique was humorous caricature. Thus one could imagine a recruit explaining to the recruiting officers the theory of the State as superior to individuals and demanding that they should leave in liberty his physical and material person and just enrol that mysterious something that contributes to building that national something known as the State. Or recall the story in the *Novellino*<sup>121</sup> in which the wise Saladin decides the issue between the innkeeper who wants to be paid for the consumption of the aroma emanating from his meat and the beggar who does not want to pay: Saladin pays him with the chinking of coin and tells the innkeeper to pocket the sound in the same way as the beggar ate the aromatic exhalations.

### *Teleology*

The treatment of the question of teleology brings out even more blatantly the *Manual's* weakness for presenting the philosophical doctrines of the past as all equally trivial and banal, so that the reader gets the impression that all past culture was a phantasmagoric sequence of Bacchantae in delirium. The method is reprehensible from various points of view. The serious reader, aiming to broaden his knowledge and deepen his understanding, believes that he is being fooled and extends his suspicions to the whole of the system. It is easy to think one has got beyond a position by denigrating it, but this is a pure verbal illusion. To give a burlesque treatment to questions can be valid for Voltaire, but not everyone can be a Voltaire, i.e. a great artist.

Thus the *Manual* presents the question of teleology in its most infantile manifestations, while ignoring the solution to the problem

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<sup>120</sup> Spirito was an ideologue of the corporate State and an idealist philosopher. Originally a student and follower of Gentile, he departed from Gentile's actualism in the 1930s. Around 1930 he was aligned with Gentile against Croce and Einaudi over the role of the State, but his position over the subordination of the citizen to the State through the mediation of the "corporation" was more extreme than that of Gentile and contained anti-capitalist implications (the "corporation as property": see p. 291 of this volume) which were no doubt a reason for Gentile's qualifications. For Gramsci's assessment of the overall debate see pp. 271-272 and also PP. pp. 31-2, and MS. 275 277.

<sup>121</sup> The *Novellino*, otherwise known as the *Cento Novelle Antiche*, is the earliest extant collection of Italian short stories, dating from the thirteenth century. The story in question, rather inaccurately recalled by Gramsci, is No. IX.

offered by Kant. It could perhaps be demonstrated that in the *Manual* there survives a lot of unconscious teleology which without knowing it reproduces the Kantian point of view. See for example the chapter on the "Equilibrium of Nature and Society".\*

### *On Art*

In the chapter devoted to Art it is affirmed that the most recent works on aesthetics maintain the unity of form and content. This can be seen as one of the most glaring examples of the author's critical inability to establish the history of concepts and to identify the real significance of the concepts themselves within various theories. In point of fact the identification of content and form is affirmed by idealist aesthetics (Croce), but on idealistic premisses and with idealistic terminology. "Content" and "form" do not therefore have the meaning the *Manual* supposes. That form and content are identified means that in art the content is not the "abstract subject", that is the novelistic plot and a particular mass of generic sentiments, but is art itself, a philosophical category, a "distinct" moment of the spirit, etc. Nor does form mean "technique" as the *Manual* maintains.

All the points and references to aesthetics and to artistic criticism in the *Manual* should be collected and analysed. Meanwhile one can take as an example the section devoted to Goethe's *Prometheus*. The judgment given is superficial and extremely generic. The author, as far as one can gather, knows neither the exact history of

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\* From Goethe's *Xenien*: "The Teleologist" "We most humbly adore the world's good Creator who when/The cork-tree first he made, also invented the cork".<sup>122</sup> Croce in his volume on Goethe (*Opere* III, 12(i), p. 279) adds this note: "In opposition to extrinsic finalism, generally accepted in the eighteenth century and recently criticised by Kant, who had replaced it with a more profound conception of finality." Elsewhere and in another form Goethe repeats the same motif and claims to have derived it from Kant: "Kant is the most eminent of modern philosophers, the man whose doctrines have most influenced my formation. The distinction of subject and object and the scientific principle that everything exists and develops for its own proper intrinsic reasons (that the cork tree, to use a proverbial example, does not come into being to provide stoppers for our bottles) was something I held in common with Kant, and later I devoted much study to his philosophy." Might one not trace to a teleological root the expression "historic mission"? In many cases indeed this expression has acquired an equivocal and mystical meaning. But in other cases it does have a meaning, which, in the light of the Kantian conception of teleology, could be maintained and justified by the philosophy of praxis.

<sup>122</sup> The *Xenien* are a collection of epigrams written by Goethe and Schiller in elegiac couplets. The translation here is from the Italian version given by Croce as we have been unable to trace the original.

this ode of Goethe's nor the history of the Prometheus myth in world literature prior to Goethe and particularly in the period before and during Goethe's literary activity. But is it possible to give a judgment, of the type given in the *Manual*, without knowing precisely these elements? How, in their absence, can one distinguish what is strictly personal to Goethe from what is representative of an age and of a social group? Judgments of this type are justified only to the extent that they are not empty generalities containing in themselves the most disparate things but are precise, proven and decisive. Failing this they can only serve to disparage a theory and to encourage a superficial way of looking at questions. (It is again worth recalling Engels' phrase contained in the letter to a student published in the *Sozial. Akademiker*.)<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> See Engels, Letter to Bloch, 21 September 1890 (cit. above, note 74): "Unfortunately, however, it happens only too often that people think they have understood a theory and can apply it without more ado from the moment they have mastered its main principles, and those even not always correctly. And I cannot exempt many of the more recent "Marxists" from this reproach, for the most wonderful rubbish has been produced from this quarter too."